STREET SPIRIT

Volume 13, No. 1 January 2007 $1.00

A publication of the American Friends Service Committee

JUSTICE NEWS & HOMELESS BLUES IN THE BAY AREA

Angelic Choirs Sing on the Cold Concrete Streets



"Dumpster Dive" In Jonathan Burstein's painting, an angel unexpectedly appears at a trash bin in San Francisco's Mission District.

Poetic Voices of the Streets

A Special Poetry Issue of *Street Spirit*

Street Shock

by Claire J. Baker

Homelessness will grow,
will shock eternity.
Folks, it's people
just like you and me.
Seasons slowly roll
over someone's head
garbage of every kind,
an alley for a bed;
a worn-out cardboard blanket,
someone else's shirt,
a dog they find and cling to,
a baby under a skirt
or over a sidewalk vent
where else can they go?
A baby, folks, a baby,
the mother rocking hungry
helpless to and fro
while passersby may scoff
or some may spare
a dollar or a dime.
On streets the jolting shock
of time and again, and time.

symphony of heavenly sound

by Judy Jones

heaven's light
lit up all earth's skies
one night

and suddenly
before my eyes
all the homeless
were gone

not one tear more was shed
from those without
even a piece of bread

not one more heart was broken
watching us walk by
as they eat out of garbage cans
not even offering a smile
to those dying before our eyes

and all their sobs and moans
became a symphony
of heavenly sound
never heard before

the angelic choirs
were filled with
all those who died alone
on cold concrete streets

and as my eyes
gently closed
ushering in the
miracle of sleep
i knew my fervent prayers
had come true

the poorest of the poor
were no more

To One I Knew

by Mary Meriam

To the inner-city you, I send a safe clean park.
To the hungry you, I send food on the table.
To the blond you, I send a seaside Sunday.
To the suffering you, I send blue balm.
To the lover you, I send quivering Valentines.
To the poet you, I send hello and goodbye.
To the silent you, I send echoing wishes.
To the slow you, I send wild spring flowers.
To the deep you, I send my last longing.
To the unforgiving you, I send childhood songs.
To the distant you, I send a fare-thee-well.

Just for You

by Michael Creedon

To be a man
after the arduous trek to consciousness
is to shed your skin.
Revolt
against all the nonsense
with which you've been programmed.
You no longer say what you've been told to say.
No more hoarding of what you neither need
Nor want.
No need to kowtow to your killers.
You greet your friends.
The Tantras pulsate. There is no defeat.
Every instant you Are, and you are doing,
precisely what the Universe wishes you to do.
We are not intended to understand this.
Don't try, Do.
Clean the toilet. Sleep. Wake.
Quit living for what someone is conceivably
thinking about you. He's way too busy
thinking about himself. What else has he got?
This is Now. Just let yourself know it.
It's yours.

One's Story

by Mary Meriam

One clings to one's own little baby crying.
The last clean water disappears from earth.
One watches animals and people dying.
One's life grows cheap, until it lacks all worth.
What hope one has is tempered by despair.
One clings to ancient books and one to new.
Who gets to live, who doesn't, isn't fair.
One studies stars, one cells, to find a clue.

Weighed Down

by Joan Clair

Weighed down, weighed down,
by a lot of pounds and ups and downs,
few rebounds, just a lot of drowns,
buckets full of dry rain inside me sound.

Weighed down, weighed down,
not enough weight on my shoulders now,
I've escaped from what should have
had me bound, bound to in spirit,
no escape now from losses all around.

Weighed down, weighed down,
I thought I could stay on a path profound,
just one clear ride with nothing outside,
nothing inside, to bring me down.

Yeah, now, and I don't want to get up.
Just want to stay stuck. Either that or
get in front of a truck if I had the guts.
So I've got to remember the way you show up.
I throw a pair of worn out shoes away;
I find good shoes on the street that very day.

So I've got to remember those parts of my soul,
those parts of the world, which don't trip me up,
where the seagulls are and the hummingbirds,
the inner flowers,
the radiant, purple morning glories in me.

For Annie Forever

by Claire J. Baker

Blue sky, how dare you
look down on Annie's
unkempt clothes, soiled body,
uncombed gray hair.

Magnificent cumulus clouds,
she'll not climb aboard —
legs street weary from
forever movin' on.

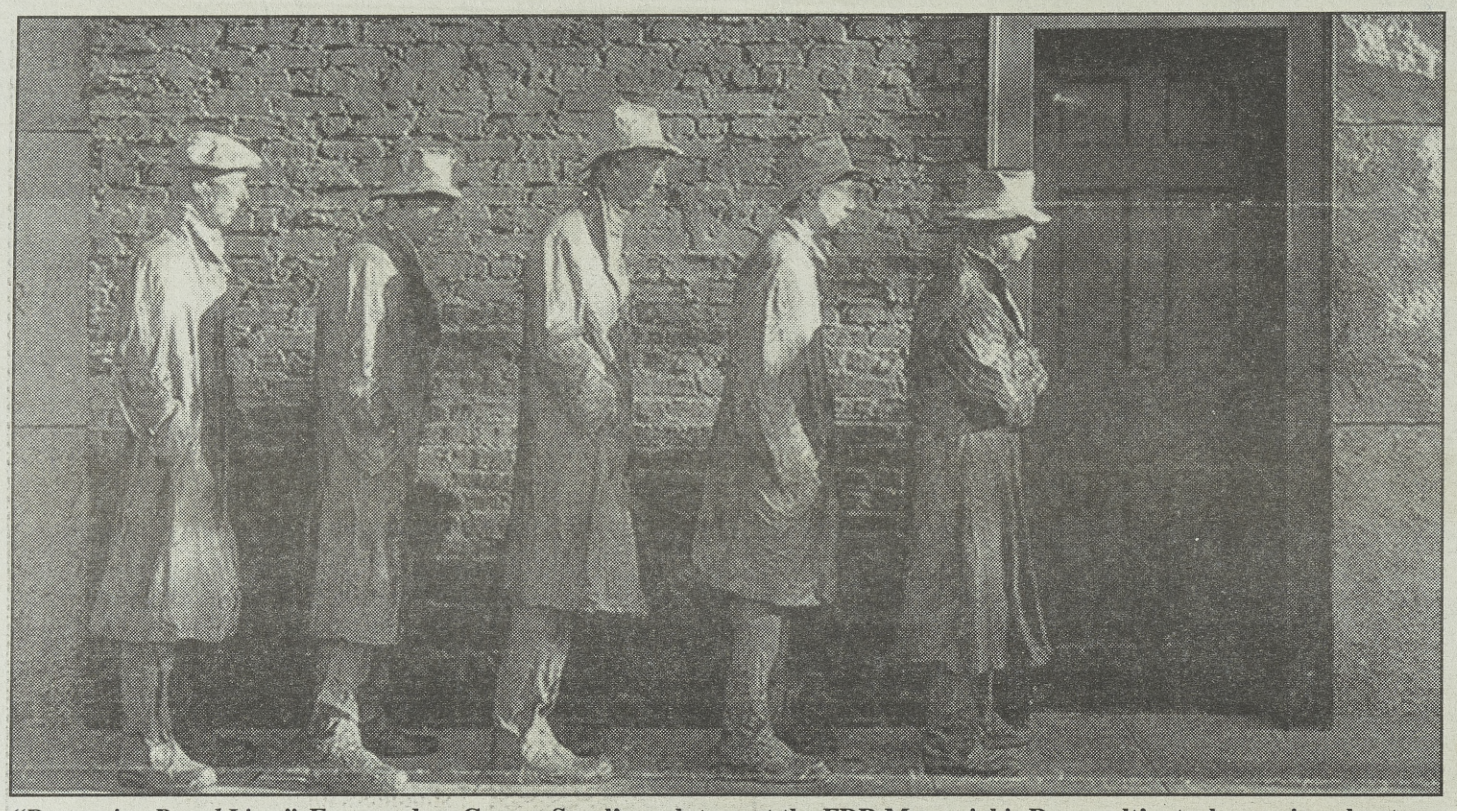
Leaf-magic forest,
you & your breezy pals
now are lost on her.
City trees are few
& good-luck blew away.

Mother Nature & all who care:
Annie has not given up...
When she is gone from
the streets, she will have
risen like a female phoenix.

Dromedary

by Michael Creedon

On the street
you carry Spirit
within yourself
like a dromedary carries
water in the desert.
Ain't nobody
handing it out
and you never know
how far
to the next oasis
or if there is one.



"Depression Bread Line." **Engraved on George Segal's sculpture at the FDR Memorial is Roosevelt's stark warning about the growing crisis of poverty: "ONE THIRD OF A NATION ILL-HOUSED, ILL-CLAD, ILL-NOURISHED."**

Those Church Goin' People

by Judy Jones

all the people
dressed in their finest
going to church today
to pray

"oh lord please
help me buy
a new home
car and wife
she's getting old
ya know

and for god's sake
make the homeless
go way

saw a five year old
kid in the street
with sign that read
"I'll do anything for
food and a bed"

it upsets my
aesthetic values
so please get those
damned beggars
off the streets

an jus' look
at that old man
with only one hand
digging in trash cans

too bad our children
have to see
these lazy bums
on the streets

i was so embarrassed today
when that homeless man
stumbled and fell
while tryin' to
kneel and pray

can't our church keep
riff raff off the streets
from comin' in
while we sing
praises to our lord

we work hard
for our pay and
deserve pretty and clean
not people that smell

just look at that little girl
in the middle of the street
asking for money
from everyone

bet her parents
live in a fine home
close by and teach
her to beg

wow I'm starved
I'll stop at
that nice cafe
over there
have a good meal
get my mind
off the homeless
ruining our streets"

I was hungry
you gave me to eat
I was homeless
you took me in
I was naked
you clothed me
amen

For Patches, Who Died Too Young

by Linda Ellen Lemaster

I drift through this town around twilight
on my broomstick
made from pain

Folks whisper to their kids, "We remember her,"
then tell me they've forgot my name

Clean water, second-hand bagels
and smelly, putrid plumbing
— on a good day —
leaves me feeling blessed

On cold days my fingers
and my knees
light up like Rudolph's nose.
Other times I'm transparent 'cept my smile.
If I have one left.
Will it help me pass this gauntlet one more time on my
walk from bus to blanket stash?
Will my bedroll still be there?

Dignified eyes staring down then away
right through me

Curious children hail me with their innocence and warmth
'Til Mommy's Auntie's Granny's haughty frozen glares
arrest their smiles their fingers and
eventually
the children's hearts, too, freeze

The buckaroo boys, all jazz and hip
and shadowboxing on the street
they see me yes then say, "Hey Lady,
got a light?" or "Got a toke?" But hurry off
like natural dudes when I reply, "Got
four bits 'cause I wanna phone my kids?"

Alone wondering just me and the pavement
Was that really *me* begging just now?
Or was it just a joke I played on me?
Whatever . . . it was something just last year
I said I'd never ever want to do

Guess I'm just a-chillin' now, and dreaming by myself
Trying to remember dreams

Got time for dreaming NOW
No more wishing babies would sleep in
for just ONE Saturday sunrise for a change
No more wishing for "white noise" when alarm clocks ring
No more staying up late just to fold the laundry or
finish work or bills while wishing rather for
t i m e
for sleep and dreaming
No more daydreams on the bus to class inspired by
my night before's school homework.
No more hot flashes in my own clean sheets
No more counting coupons on those rare nights I can't sleep
No more waking up because the neighbor's cat's in heat
or the raccoon's dumping trashcans all along the street
No more peeking at my miracle children growing
ever taller as I watch them lay asleep
No more satisfying tangles on *"my"* floor
with blankets, pillows, secrets, poems, empty
wine glasses, and You
No more quiet glowing happily alone
looking at the stars and thinking, "Where'd we buy that wine?"
and what's it mean?
and feeling how
you always made it feel like we were both
brandnew

Once I was made of those fresh cotton sheets and smells of you
Was that the real me — always wishing to recover just a little
shred of dreamtime sleeping IN someday?
I've gained and lost such heavens and hells
both mine and some I'd borrowed
yet finding now my dreams come back like
homing pigeons and uncompleted Yesterdays
still seeking their Tomorrows

California Dreamin'
And hoofing all the way
to the Mission's Styrofoam soup
Got time to dream in the daytime now
and time to dream all night
Yet now no place to lay my head
no respite from hard streets and their
cruel, unblinking lights

why god why

by Judy Jones

why god why
are there so many
dying on our streets
in horrid poverty

why do you let the homeless
suffer day and night
without a bed
to lay their heads

why do you allow
people to die hungry
and alone
why god why

"you are my hands and feet"
a most tender voice said to me

"when you pass
a homeless person
dying on the street
'tis me you see"

when you reach out
to feed house and clothe
your brothers dying
before your eyes
you will no longer ask
"why god why"

midnight doorway prophecy

by Randy Fingland

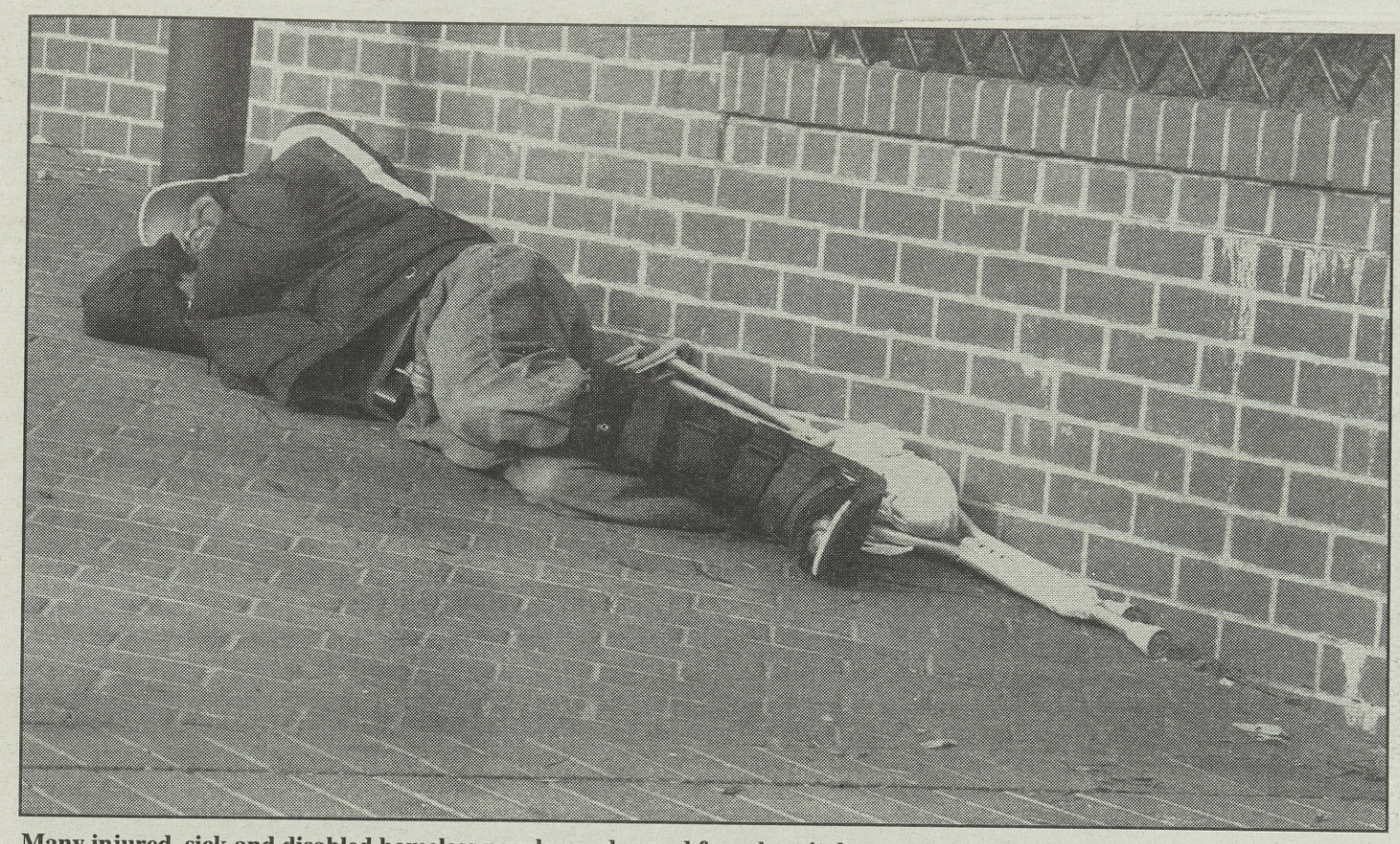
winter concrete
brings out
worst night dreams:

the world cannot
end in fire
but will end strictly in ice

Happy Birthday

by Ralph Dranow

He squats outside the post office
In frayed blue pants and jacket,
White racetrack cap,
A black glove covering his right hand.
"Spare change," he says softly,
His face gaunt, weathered,
Hills and valleys.
I drop my usual quarter
In his styrofoam cup.
He nods, cracked lips smiling.
"Did you see the wrestling match
Last night?"
His voice excited, high-pitched.
"No," I say.
He shakes his head.
"You really missed a good one.
This guy who's regular size,
He gave this 500-pound dude
A candy-coated apple.
So the sucker takes a bite
And then he's bent over, coughing,
Like he s gonna die.
Then the little guy pinned him."
He cackles, mouth full of empty spaces,
Flutters his arms, then says,
"Next Tuesday is my birthday.
I'm gonna be 57."
He looks at least 70.
"Happy birthday," I say instead.
"Are you going to celebrate?"
"Huh?"
"You know, do something special."
He shrugs.
"Most of my people have passed on,
Gone to their heavenly rest.
I have a brother in Oakland
But me and him don't get along.
My sister will probably give me
Some cake, maybe a beer."
His eyes look empty,
And I regret my question.
He waves me away.
"I need to make some money."
"Happy birthday, " I repeat,
Foolishly.



Many injured, sick and disabled homeless people are dumped from hospitals to recuperate on the streets. Lydia Gans photo

Harmless Fun

(A Found Poem from Various Websites)

by Jan Steckel

NEWS ITEM: **TWO FLORIDA TEENS ARE
CHARGED IN A STRING OF BRUTAL BEATINGS
WHICH LEFT ONE HOMELESS MAN DEAD.
SURVEILLANCE VIDEO SHOWS
THE SUSPECTS WIELDING BASEBALL BATS
You might think "The Warriors"
is just a basic brawling game,
but it is actually so much more.
THOSE DERELICTS HAD IT COMING,
NO QUESTION ABOUT IT
Each level I play,
I explore all of it.
THOSE SMELLY LOWLIVES
On the third level,
I encountered a lot of homeless people
that were either too weak to walk normally
or were asleep.
PUBLIC INDECENCY,
WHERE DO YOU THINK THIS BUM
WAS GOING TO THE BATHROOM,
THAT'S RIGHT, ON THE LAWN
WHERE THE COLLEGE KIDS LIKE TO
SIT AND STUDY ON A NICE DAY OR
MAYBE EVEN ON THE SIDE OF THE BUILDING
OUR PUBLIC TAX DOLLARS PAID FOR
I decided to have fun with one that was sleeping
by throwing a trash can at him.
It woke him up, and he questioned why I did it.
THOSE BOYS DID A FINE JOB PROTECTING
THEMSELVES AND THEIR COMMUNITY.
I WOULD BE RIGHT PROUD
IF THEY DID THE SAME THING IN MY TOWN
I grabbed him and threw his body into a barrel
that had a fire going in it. He caught fire,
and while he was still on fire,
I threw a brick at him.
THE HOMELESS BREED DOES VERY
VICIOUS AND VILE THINGS TO SURVIVE
BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY
Sure, it sounds cruel,
and video game anti-violence groups
may have something to say about it,
but it's nothing more than
harmless fun.**

"I only wanted to be a child"

by Judy Jones

**on the 13-year-old boy's
tombstone it read**

**"i only wanted to be a child
but they wouldn't let me"**

**he was
kicked to death
by four men**

**"you have no right
to live on the street
and beg to eat"
they screamed**

i suddenly could see
**the face of every
homeless child on earth**

**i saw a billion tiny hands
reaching out to us for help
and little bodies standing
in pools of blood;
the tears they cried
with all their might
every night
had turned red**

**"oh please
take me in
love me
hold me tight to your breast
let me be a child
if only for one night
then i'll go away
oh please"**

**and my heart opened wide
as divine light poured in
for i knew
when not one tiny child
goes to sleep
on a cold street**

**when not one little child
is hungry and murdered
for having no home
i would sleep peacefully again
but until then**

i had much work to do

don't give money

by Judy Jones

**don't give a penny
to the homeless
before your eyes**

**just close your hearts
walk on by
after all it's not you
so why care**

**if the old woman
dies in the night
from cold, fear, and all the
other dangers especially there
for women and children
on the streets
who cares**

walk on by
**don't look
they *chose* to be there**

**and the news
says we are harming them
offering money for food
after all
they might spend it on booze**

**close your hearts
let your souls die
and walk on by
after all it's not you**

or is it

The Old Dog

by Michael Andrew Glaros

**The old dog's curly
hind legs worked as he ran
through his dream
pacing himself to a child.
Towards the end of his dream
the old curly dog moaned,
rolled over in the dirt
exposing all his old scars
— to the moon, every
wound not concealed by fur.
Pain of old wounds woke him
and he felt the real world
— all around him.
And with that
a fresh spate of howling.**

go away you filthy man

by Judy Jones

**"go away
you filthy man
leave my wife and i alone"**

**"but sir"
he cried
"i'm deaf
hungry and homeless
can't you give me
a dollar or two
for food"**

**"i told you
leave us alone
or we'll call the police
you smell and are sick
go away
there's food in those trash cans
good enough for you"**

**the crippled man
turned around
shoulders hanging down
and he started to sob
falling to the ground**

**and i wondered what
would i do
and my heart knew
without love
i could not live**

**I heard his sobs
felt his fear
touched his tears
in my sleep that night
and promised
to do anything i could
if god would promise me
someday
not one of my brothers would
die on a cold concrete street**

**but i knew
making that promise
come true
wasn't up to
*god to do***
it's up to me and you

***i was homeless did you take me in
i was hungry did you feed me
i was naked did you clothe me***

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❒ **I enclose $25 for one year's subscription.**

❒ **I enclose a donation of ❒ $100 ❒ $50 ❒ $ 25**

January 2007

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Street Spirit

Street Spirit is published by **American Friends Service Committee.** The vendor program is run by **BOSS (Building Opportunities for Self-Sufficiency).**

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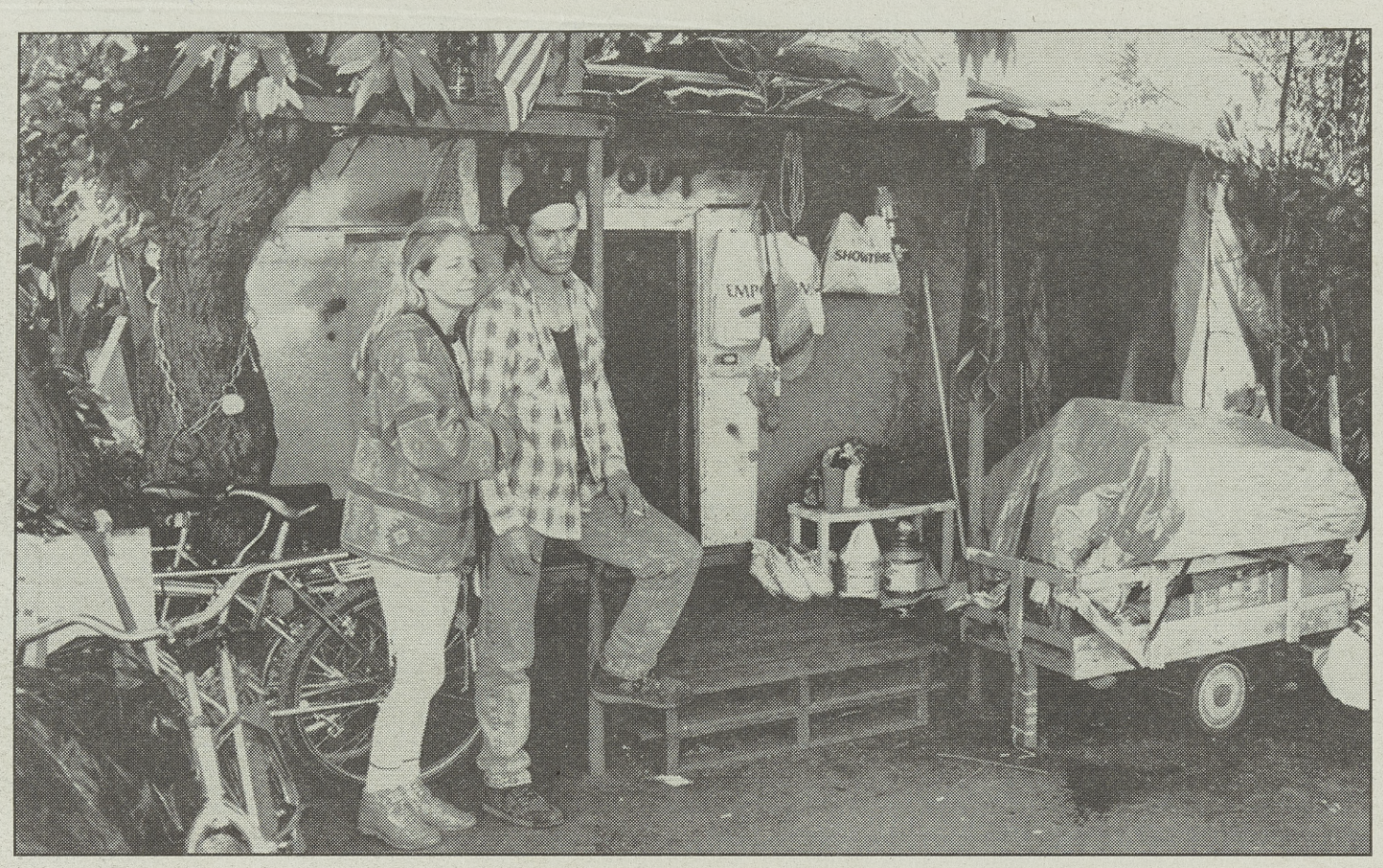
Street Spirit welcomes submissions of articles, poems, photos and art, but cannot guarantee they will be published.

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TENT CITIES

by Gerardo Gomez

The LAPD wants to
prevent tent cities
from being built in this city
by arresting homeless people
but all they're doing is stripping
homeless peoples' civil liberties
and strengthening our infantry
in this war against this Lost City
where they continue allowing
the wealthy to fatten their pockets
while in my community
they spread poverty and misery
creating the biggest catastrophe
since Katrina hit N.O.
our ground zero
is found in Skid Row
where LAPD wants to fight crimes
but are letting drugs flow
if the city wants to prevent tent cities
they should start pumping resources
in our communities
rather than adding more cops
because this is a conspiracy theory
designed by the LAPD and Jan Perry
to transform our community
to accommodate the wealthy
by sweeping homeless people
to other low income communities.



A homeless couple await their imminent eviction during a police raid that demolished their encampment. Jan Spence photo

A Letter to Still Life

by Rhonda Burl

To the homeless
With a home in your heart
The earth yielding its elements to you
Cold, rain, sunshine, and land —
A squatter who knows the life of pain
And a helping hand without judgment,
When money is placed inside
an outstretched palm

God have mercy
Whatever causes them to be?
Without the basic blessings
That I take for granted —
A job, health, family love for me
This is a reminder of what I could be
If tribulations found me

I don't know your story and
I won't try to justify your circumstance
with scripture.
I'll give to what I see —
A human suffering, made in the image
and likeness of me

Laws

by Joan Clair

"...thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." —Lord's prayer

Laws that take away
the freedom of another being —
the right to sleep,
the right to be on streets —
take away the freedom of the earth
to be at one with heaven
on her turf.

The Holy I

by Ralph Dranow

I filled out a survey here
At St. Anthony's.
They asked how many portions
I usually ate at lunch.
I said, three.
One for the Father,
One for the Son,
And one for the Holy I.
Things are looking up.
I couldn't find work for months.
Yesterday I saw a Help Wanted sign
In a bar. So I went in
And gave them my resume.
The guy handed me a mop,
Told me to get to work.
Tonight I'm making ice
And cleaning windows.
I think my luck is changing.
It's a full moon.

I Call Him Horace

by Perry Terrell

I officially met a man
That stands on the corner
From where I work

I have to pass by him
At least twice a day
Sometime three
If I take a walking lunch

He squeezes an accordion
In my opinion
He can't play it
And I can't figure out
Whether he thinks he can

While I was waiting
To cross the street one evening
He seemed to be playing
Just for me
So I asked him to
Name that tune
He said "Sweet Georgia Brown"
I know that tune
And that wasn't it

Horace then asked my name
I gave him my correct name
Because I see him almost everyday
And he's harmless

Since we had gotten personal
I put a dollar and twenty-five cents
In quarters
In his badly tarnished brass bowl
He thanked me
And cranked up his tune

When I saw Horace
The next morning
He was asleep when I passed by
But when I saw him
As I left work that evening
He spoke to me
And called my name

He wasn't squeezing his accordion
He appeared to be taking a break
I put a dollar in his brass bowl anyway
Because that is how Horace makes his living

We now make small talk about the weather
And now Horace is a friend of mine.

Nest

by Mary Meriam

Two strange birds talk of being
separate from the flock,
can imagine fingers interlocked,
hand in hand down walks of dreaming,
no stares, no fear, no jerks in junky cars
screaming queer — we close our ears
to hate and open ears at home to beats
of domesticity, — bed, kitchen, bath, garden
shared — a place on earth to rest our wings.

Grace's Eyes

by Merry Gangemi

Old she is
past eighty,
thick eyeglasses
filled with hot sun,

her three-footed cane
like an elephant's foot
dangling from the handle
of the shopping cart.

Stuck in a rut
of asphalt and weeds.

The road to Barre
is a busy two-laner,
strip malls and
supermarkets.

There was Grace;
five miles to go
before she could
climb the twenty-five steps

to her front porch,
unlock the battered front door,

pop open that Miller,
fall back
into her easy chair

the world shut out
children gone
husband dead these
thirty-seven years.

Grace is old and
smelled bad,
drank a lot of beer.
She was furious that the taxi
never showed up.

So we helped her out.
Drove her home.
Brought her groceries
up the twenty-five steps

to her crowded front porch.
We waited,
until she was half-way there
and then drove away.

Too Broken to See

by Mary Meriam

I knew from the start
you are a heartbreak
slowly, quietly, killing yourself
who will take no help
an isolate,
a sensitive devastate,
belonging to no one.
You ask me to watch you drown
and do nothing.
You ask me to watch you snuff out
your heaven of stars, one by one,
and call this fun.

ANTI-SOCIAL WORKER

by Selma Spector-Vincent

Anti-social worker,
hiding in your files
Every time we meet you greet me
with your phony smile.
Ask me how I've been
then you mispronounce my name
Misses Vincent, Misses Smith,
to you it's all the same.

Of course I'm looking for a job
There's so much I can do.
I bet that I could learn to shuffle papers
just like you.

There's no need to worry
I really live alone.
There's no need to send your spies out
checking on my home.
No one's in the closet,
No one's down the hall
No one's under the kitchen sink
Or hiding in the toilet bowl

Of course I'm looking for a job
There's so much I can do
I bet that I could learn to shuffle papers
just like you.

Life is free and easy,
I'm living mighty high.
The Cadillac that's parked out back,
Is the one I plan to buy.
Had my teeth fixed just for fun
Not a one cause any pain.
And I always trade my debit card in on
Whiskey and cocaine

I'll go insane, if I remain,
much longer on relief.
Too old to be a prostitute,
too slow to be a thief.
Think I'll go back to college now,
And earn some high degree.
So when the cutbacks cut out you,
You'll have to come to me.

I know you're looking for a job,
There's not much I can do.
I guess you'll have to learn
to shuffle
Like I used to do.

Passengers in My Taxi

by Mary Meriam

She plops a puppy in my lap.
Maybe she knows I'm alone.

He tips big, smiles big.
Maybe he knows I'm poor.

She offers a hot roasted chestnut.
Maybe she knows I'm hungry.

He hands me a diamond ring.
Maybe he knows I'm broken-hearted.

Literate

by Gary Peterson

other than the state of Iowa,
which the Des Moines Register claims
is the most literate state in the union —
and they do have a vested interest —
the homeless, from my astute observations,
are the most literate people in America

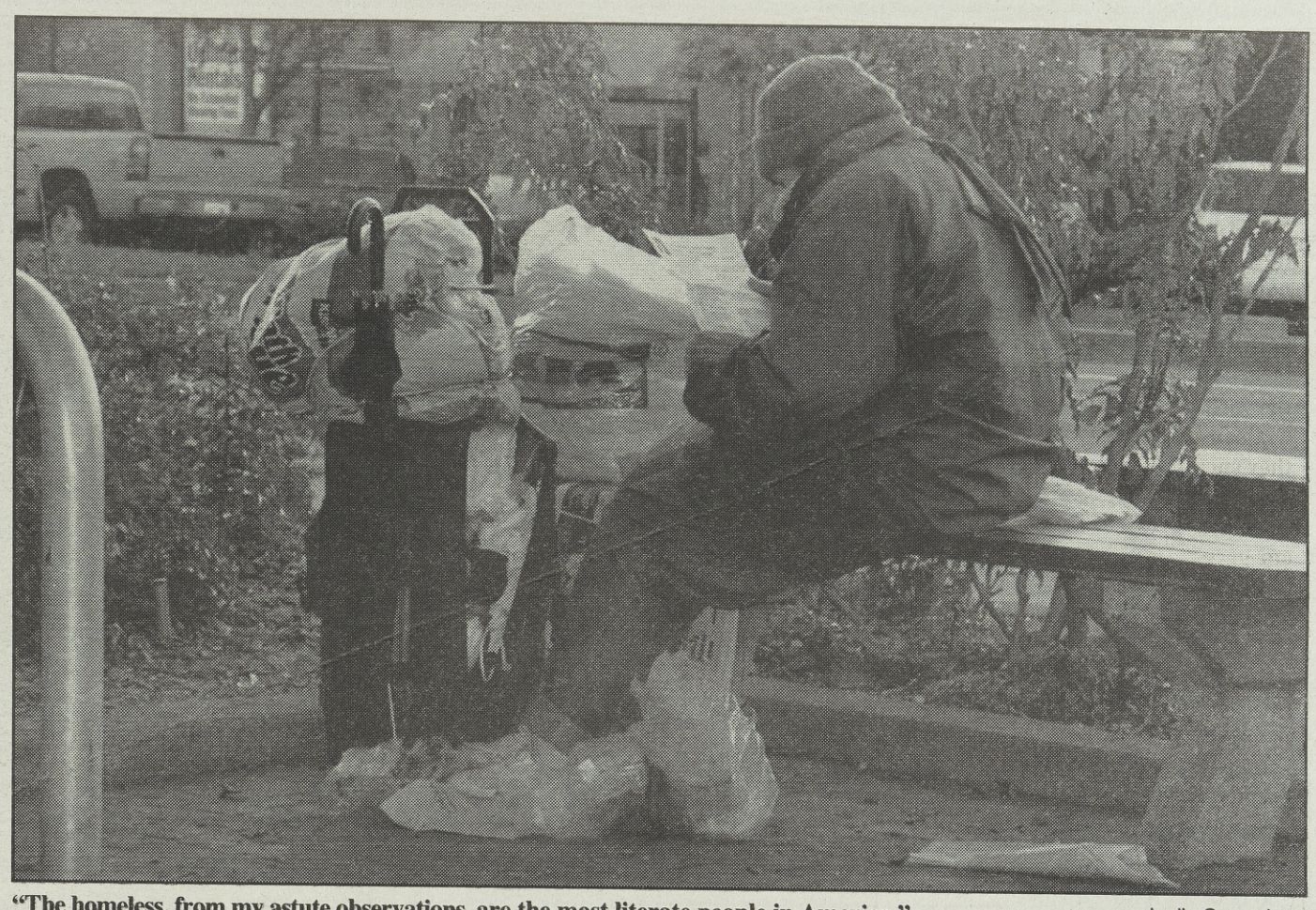
they read discarded newspapers
in coffeehouses
& books in front of the library,
waiting for it to open
& fliers listing where the free food is

& tickets given them for being homeless
i.e., existing
& bilingual signs in buses
and hospitals —
it's the law —

& security as written
on the way too many jackets
of the way too many pretend police
protecting everything from the homeless —
those dangerous, most literate people in
America

if they read the Onion
they're still laughing
if they read Kafka
they've given up

like all the cab drivers
in Madison, WI, with PhDs
the homeless are a college of knowledge
and we treat them like they're stupid



"The homeless, from my astute observations, are the most literate people in America." Lydia Gans photo

GENERATIONS

by Eileen Corder

Now I lay me down to sleep
on the biggest swing in the world.
When it's time to land, Earth
will still be 25,000 miles around
and around
and I'll descend,
fence posts coming into view,
at intervals that quicken like a pulse,
shouting, "Keep moving, Friend.
Keep up the spirit
and KEEP OUT."

It just takes a little fuel — low grade
works for me — to jettison back into space
where I don't have to dream
of locks and walls joined in conspiracies,
that old man river of dollars
that just keeps rolling out one door
and down the gutter.

None of it matters when you're loaded
with solid ideas, the ones
that hit and I forget...
little children, like the ones
beside me. Where are their beds
lumpy with toys, a cheap curtain
billowing like a saint, the friendly
smell of earth commingled
with no man's might?

Little children, whose names I didn't catch
because I was further back in line,
what do they dream?
What will they
when they're my age and want to let go
for the night?

Depression

by Joan Clair

Depression, not a steep incline,
more like a sluggish slope
within the mind that says,
"I cannot cope or do not want to try.
Why bother when there is no hope?"

Yet it is possible to climb
bit by bit, not with ease,
more humbly than scaling mountain peaks,
out of one's despairing depths
where sobbing roars like waterfalls
which haven't been released
in the forest of one's soul
heard only by the One who knows

and step by step overcome one's death.

Twilight

by Deirdre Evans

There's someone asleep in the park now
Don't you see him there under the bush?
See how he huddles and shivers and puddles
See, even his breathing is hushed
It's true that his friends are all gone now
Save the glass once clutched tight in his hand
His hopes and his dreams have been destined it seems
To crumble to ashes and sand
Once he was a bright-eyed boy dreaming
Once he was a young man with a wife
Now he always wakes sobbing and screaming
In the bitter twilight of his life
I guess he won't be long remembered
When Death puts an end to his woe
There are many such souls so dismembered
No one knows how they come; how they go

Ashes All Is Ashes

by Husayn Sayfuddiyn

In the Valleys of Yes and No
And between the two our fields we sow
from the mountain tops the vales we view
and descending to what we believe is true
In the panoply of nights and days we trace
Beneath the canopy of Sun and stars we race
Towards the elusive Truth we vie to make
Our idyllic truth we will later forsake
For the heaps of gold, or a cup of wine
The beautiful face you wish to say is mine
Ashes, ashes, all is ashes in the end
returned to the stardust from whence it all began
one is a worker and another is rich
one is sweet and loving and the other's a bitch
one lurks in death valley
another in the wino's alley where they hide to drink
one is brilliant and another refuses to think
in the cavalcade to ashes
where there are no year-round passes
for staying alive
where everyone wakes up knowing they too soon will die,
the only truth they know
the throne you sit upon too soon will blow.
Ashes all is ashes in the end
Leaving but an anecdote in the annals of when
And all the lofty laurels bestowed upon your head
And what good will it be to you my friend, when dead?

Bureaucracy

by Michael A. Glaros

At the mercy of
— bureaucrats
in distant beehives
of government offices
who spend days
shifting files, and
shifting the lives
of human beings.

You May Kiss!

by Mary Meriam

Flowers and vows,
a long line, a crowd.
Cheers for the fearless
defenders of queers.
Let the senate debate,
let the president wait.
Now ring the bell
for Phyllis and Del.

Hanging on by the Fingernails

by Marianne Robinson

Outside Andronico's
a black woman is asking for signers
of a petition to support landmark buildings
instead of big developers' plans
(which they swear will offer some "affordable housing")
and though I know people need housing
I have no confidence that these
revolting developments will answer those needs
so I sign the petition.

And she has another petition
to protect renters from evictions
if their living quarters are turned into condos or TICs
(tenants in common, if you can afford the price)
and I sign that one with more conviction
living in a building where the rent in decontrolled
apartments is 3 times more than mine
and only 2 apartments are still under rent control.

We talk about the tax burden
on people at the bottom
while those at the top get tax breaks
and there's less and less for poor folks.
The signature-getter says she's tired (it's 11 a.m.)
and must work the rest of the day
for the small wage she will be paid.

And next to us, at the entrance to Andronico's
where shoppers go about their rounds
on this Memorial Day weekend,
a white woman leaning on a shopping cart
complains loudly in frustration and anger about the
cab drivers who yell at her for not using a walker
in her disabled state, legs twisted and weak,
"I climb up two flights of stairs to where I live,"
she says, mind sharp, words clear,
"and sometimes the muscles in my stomach hurt."

I listen awhile and venture that life ain't fair
and tell her she's doing fine
and as we walk to the car, my friend and I note
that the food samples Andronico's
puts out to entice shoppers —
the crackers and jam, the cheese and strawberries —
are depleted by 10 a.m., with only crumbs and toothpicks
remaining for those who arrive too late.

Quiet Day in Hell

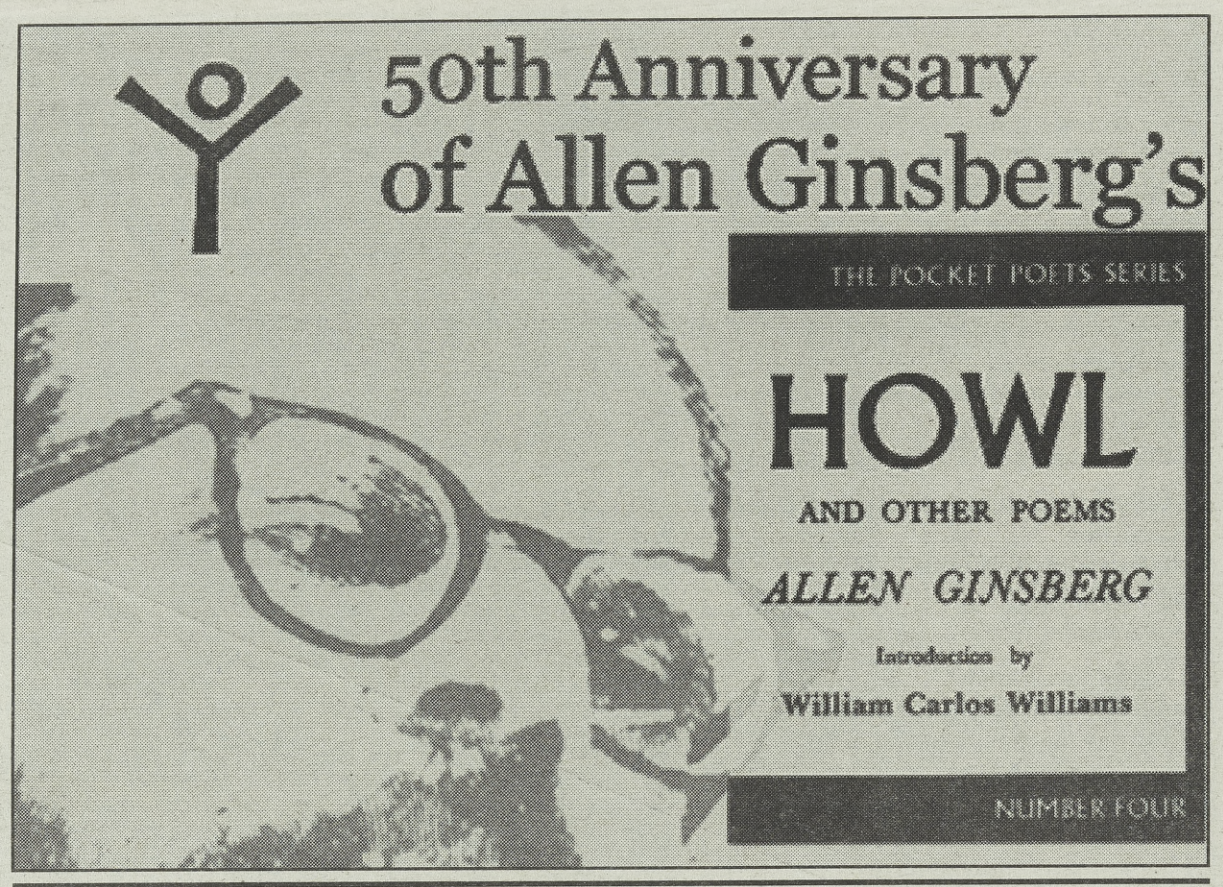
by Michael Creedon

We're gonna have a little peace and quiet in hell.
Turn down the volume on the screams.
No food, no spare change, no drunks vomiting in
doorways — it's all still there but you can't hear them.
Would this make things nicey-nice or would we just
hear the scream inside at the sight of all that suffering?
You can't even hear the click of your car door.
I know the answer.
Screaming and suffering go hand in hand
whether you hear it or not.

For the 50th Anniversary of "Howl"

by Julia Vinograd

Ginsberg is a truck smuggling illegal aliens
over the borders of poetry.
Young men ready to do jobs Americans don't want,
climbing thru sewers of song, turning their tears into wine,
hanging hangovers on flagpoles and saluting.
No one's more alien than an alienated poet
bitch-slapped by morning light, every morning.
Ginsberg is a truck smuggling illegal aliens
past walls of paper guarded by gun towers
and attack dogs leaping at the groins
of de-construction workers, who give lines
impossibly long erections and scatter words like
their neon-bright seed all over the page.
Ginsberg is a truck made of flowers,
a float in the Gay Pride parade floating in mid-air
surrounded by Buddhist sages also floating in mid-air
and chanting. The truck is packed with naked lovers,
escaped from jails on the moon,
now floating in each others' arms.
Ginsberg is a truck smuggling illegal aliens thru
scorched rocks and tumbleweed, but he's not a coyote
whose nose knows the desert for a price.
Ginsberg is the Coyote God and woe to all
who take his name in vain.
They shall suffer from disgraceful fits of giggles
unto the 7th generation.
Ginsberg is a truck that knows no borders.
He's been up and down Jacob's ladder
and honks with whales under the sea
and never runs out of gas.
Ginsberg is a truck smuggling the future,
yes Virginia, there is a future.
The door is open.
The key's in the ignition.
Get in.
Drive.



Ginsberg is the Coyote God and woe to all who take his name in vain. They shall suffer from disgraceful fits of giggles unto the 7th generation.

The Rose Garden

by Husayn Sayfuddiyn

In the Rose Garden where under the clear blue balmy day
The petals are strewn across the grass and tiled walkway
the soft, sweet fragrance haunts the air as if an elusive jinn
dancing through the air as if led by impish whim
and each dying rose is stripped in the lilting breeze
to leave the stems and thorns and naked trees
to face the Roseless days
with smoky fragrance and beauty that is cold
like the once fair damsels now wrinkled and old
in Roseless Gardens where only stems and thorns remain
where Beauty keeps her vigil though none of her petals retain
'Til the Garden is unvisited and the snow has painted white
while Beauty's lingering visage recalls her ethereal delight
Until the lovely Petals again the thorns conceal
and though Beauty lures you, her Thorns are real

Reach the Ocean

by Claire J. Baker

Climb onto a moment
that molecule
that mountain

see coves harboring clouds
clouds harboring coves
infinities of fantasy

nothing to remember
nothing to forget
in your life struggle

Feel your heart
beating slower
than the start of time.

homeless on holidays

by Randy Fingland

arrhythmic roam
down avenues of hunger
in the neverland
of a living wage
where the congress
of food, clothes & shelter
is epitomized
a realized life
when in this terrified
universe on the run
full of punishment
at each progression
the lone citizen survives

Flavoring

by Ralph Dranow

On the food line
Servers fill my tray with
Lettuce drenched in mayonnaise,
Beef and rice,
Bread and butter, donut half,
Unripe fruit, Kool Aid.
I pick my way past packed tables,
Finally find an empty place.
A while later a tall, goateed man
Wearing a padded jacket,
Thinning hair combed into bangs,
Sits down next to me.
He opens a green cloth bag
Filled with small bottles,
Removes two, which he sprinkles
Liberally over his food.
"What are you doing?" I ask.
His voice soft, he looks straight
Ahead as if speaking to himself.
"I'm using a little parsley and
some chives to flavor my food.
It depends on what I'm eating.
If it's Italian, I'll use some garlic.
If it's Hungarian, some paprika."
He samples the rice,
Rolls it around in his mouth,
Ponders,
Then adds a bit more parsley.
"Good idea," I tell him,
Realizing that he's
Transformed St. Anthony's
Into his own private dining room.

Death and Rebirth

by Michael Creedon

I'm starting over
and I don't know it yet.
The cocoon has been so strong
it's been three years bursting
and some of the jello
still holds my wings.

I remember the night it hit me
that John Lennon was dead.
It was 2 a.m. and I was working
graveyard as a night counselor
at a Treatment Center Detox.
John's song "Woman" came on
the radio and the dam broke.
The tears flowed for half an hour.
I missed that beautiful artist so.
I never met him, but he was
like a brother.

I live in a strange village, though
against my will I sleep elsewhere.
When my blood brother died
I spent his last night with him.
Grace and vision from his soul.
I hadn't the money to go to his
official funeral, so my
Native American girlfriend
and I buried some of the
things from his and my past in
the mountains, by running water.
Now my wings are unfolding.
All I have to do is let it happen.

My Sister Paints Still Lives

by Julia Vinograd

My sister paints still lives.
Oranges and peaches so stilled on a canvas
their taste changes the world. Eve's apple.
Persephone's pomegranate. Grapes that made the wine
called blood at the Last Supper.
The human history of falling down.
But in each peach fuzzy with sunlight
is the equal possibility of falling up.
If we could reach into the no longer flat canvas
and squeeze that ripeness
like any lover the first time breasts
spill into his hands;
if we could feed only on beauty
we could fly.
Our lives would no longer be stilled to schedules,
made to run in place and never move.
If we could peel dust off our eyes
like peeling the skin of an orange
could we see each other?
Could we taste the brief sweetness we were all born with?
All we remember from Eve's apple
is how the knowledge of evil came into the world.
But the same apple holds the knowledge of good
waiting to be eaten in a painting on a purple cloth
near a silver pitcher of cool water.
Or as the first thing we reach for when we wake.
Wake up. Trust your hands.

street court

by Randy Fingland

scientists couldn't
solve the riddle
of the streets
the same as
politicians before them

the DNA tests all
proved negative —
remain in the streets
with only cell doors
opened to you

your sentence is to
live at the crossroads
no bread no water
weather it
said the judge

it's what you earned
yourself
in this great country
of ours
where you were born

peer pressure

by Randy Fingland

excuse me
my invisible shield
isn't kicking in just now
needs new batteries
& therefore
you can see me
standing before you
with my open palm
for alms extended

what is it you want
me to say
to justify the situation
although one suggestion
is that you open up to
reality trips
realize that fate
might be looking over
your shoulder
preparing to reverse
your world
as you expect it

VALENTINE

by Julia Vinograd

I bought a rose, a red, red rose,
put it in a bottle and threw it out to sea.
Whoever finds it, there is no map,
no buried treasure, no secret decoder ring,
no invisible ink.
What's written on a rose, scented, long-stemmed
is easy to read.
If you look past the rose and see our battleships
ready to bomb the hanging gardens of Babylon
the rose is still there, cupped in your palm.
If the bottle breaks on the craggy rocks of Ireland
where the singing dead have no mercy
the rose has no mercy.
Love has no mercy.
If the rose washes up, living, in the Dead Sea
touch it with living hands.
Never take it to a grave.
Follow the curl of the partly open petals
with one finger. Gently.
The rose changes nothing.
Expect nothing.
It's for you.

Waves of Windy Birds

by Claire J. Baker

Son, though you stomped away
memories of you come in waves
of windy birds
sweeping away clouds,
harsh sounds.
Though you know not of this poem
I feel you stirring as I write.
I dedicate its air & fire to you.

In the turmoil of your tarnished epic,
your slow fall from the mountain peak,
as your Merry-Go-Round grinds
to a stop & it was not merry,
know that I/we are here
awaiting your return
in waves of windy birds.



To a homeless son: Memories of you come in waves of windy birds, sweeping away the clouds. Lydia Gans photo

Peaches

by Ralph Dranow

Cool San Francisco summer sunshine.
The food line at St. Anthony's
On Golden Gate Avenue.
Pigeons strut in the gutter,
Scuffling for scraps of bread.
A man on the street hawks cigarettes.
Another, in a booming voice,
Sells Jesus.
The man and woman in front of me:
He's compact,
Narrow-eyed,
Tough-looking.
She has big, soft eyes.
Red sores mar
The smooth brown skin of her cheeks.
He says, "I hear they're serving peaches.
Peaches have a lot of Vitamin C.
Garlic, onions and goldenrod tea.
Take some every day and they'll
Get your red blood cells circulating
And strengthen your immune system."
She laughs.
"What are you talking about, Joey?
You don't take that stuff any more."
A sigh escapes him.
"Maybe we can go swimming soon,"
She says.
"I haven't gone swimming in a
Long time."
He shrugs,
Changes the subject.
The line inches forward.
"Hey, Joey, who's that pretty lady
With you?" a woman in line asks.
"That's my wife, Charlene."
A small smile slides over his taut face.
I glance at Charlene,
Decide she's beautiful,
Even with the sores.
Soon I lose track of Joey and Charlene.

Later, in the dining room,
I'm startled by a shrill voice
Slicing through the air.
"Joey, where are you?... Joey!"
It's Charlene dashing back and forth,
Panic souring her lovely eyes.
Her blouse hikes up as she runs,
Revealing a ring of sores
Girdling her belly and back.
Then she sees Joey in line for seconds.
"Joey!" she sings, rushing over to him,
Jostling elbows and thighs
In her heedless joy.

Cocoa Sister

by Mary Meriam

With her dreadlocks and cocoa skin,
her big laugh and bayou way,
With her notebook and pen in hand,
Cheryl Fischer enters the fray!

Upsets the good ol' girls and boys
with every word she writes,
Upsets the Ozark status quo
and fights for civil rights!

Runners' Race

by Joan Clair

Driving by a marina, I saw a runners' race.
A runners' road had been repaved,
and they were on their way.
And then I saw a woman bearing something,
more supplies? A bunch of water jugs
were on the road I'd just passed by.
But no, they were her supplies inside a
shopping cart she was pushing down the track.
It should have set her blatantly apart.
But the runners and the woman
blended in, in some strange way
as if this kind of thing happened every day.

The scene seemed to call for social commentary.
Here was the irony of poverty
walking past prosperity.
Here was prosperity
running oppositely past poverty,
unacknowledged, as if all took place invisibly.

This was such a startling incongruity, it should
have stopped them all dead in their tracks.

Yet there was something in the scene
that went beyond that.
The universe joined all being in sunlit ecstasy.

Reaching Out to the Homeless

by Maureen Hartmann

The homeless gathered yesterday
at one of their favorite haunts,
St. Vincent de Paul's Community Center,
which serves a free lunch every day of the week.
They came for a smorgasbord of free services:
massage, health care, clothing and hair cuts.
A photograph of an African-American woman
having her blood drawn for a diabetes
physical, showed her grimacing as in agony
from the pinch of the needle.
It's as if she could not endure the slight sting
on top of the psychic pain of poverty.
Another photograph shows a three-year-old
African American girl, looking very pleased,
putting on a pair of new colorful rain boots.
A third photograph shows a white hand on
the wrist of an African American hand
testing the blood pressure.
The dark hand is stretched out on a
dark surface as Jesus' hand on the cross.
Suffering was relieved, if only for a short time,
at the fair for the homeless.

Her Hands Hurt

by Mary Meriam

The pain feels like a reminder
but of what? Her hands don't know
and have no mind to understand.
Her hands cover her weeping face.
Fall is here, the shadow of the moth
covers the wall, and her hands cannot
remove the moth or stop the fall.

mud in your eye

by Randy Fingland

these murky times
filled with rivers
of toxic silt
down the gullet

cause tears
to fill the gutters
many sleep between
instead of in mangers

unable to protect
dreams of
better futures
under one roof
indivisible

unholy fist

by Randy Fingland

it takes all kind
to rule
against the prevailing

gravitational vibe
of pull
in downward motion

to hunger
homelessness
& squalor

by squandering
earth's potential care
at the hands

of true time pirates
mapping out
the world tomorrow

Morning Chill

by George Wynn

Upon the terror
of waking
I want to breakdown
I pray to die

I need to step
out of my body
to be free of anxiety

I want to flee
to a nunnery
(even when I'm upset
I still favor the ladies
over the monastery
even though they would
never let me in)
with one bare room
with a bed and books
for one old man

Then I begin
to read and write
poetry
and here I am

ENDANGERED

by Claire J. Baker

Though mostly at peace these days
sometimes I quake as I ride the
robot arm of Spaceship Poetry,
weightless in meditation,
our planet earth so beautiful,
so endangered. So many suffering.

I could sever the tie,
fly into space as air, admit
I have come up with no plan
to alter the drawn blue lines
of God's design — or if
there is a God at all?

A Letter Needing No Stamp

by Mitchell Zeftel

To His Supreme Holiness the Lord:
I sometimes wonder how
you can bear the dreadful burden
of knowing everyone's thoughts...
the anguish,
the heartbreak,
the agony.
How can you even relax?
Maybe you try not
to get too involved
or maybe you spend
all night weeping.

Why did you create
such a sad world?
Why don't sandwiches grow
on trees? Why do infants die?
Why do honest people get cheated?
Why do the poor get crushed
to the wall?
Personally, I would turn down
your job in a second.
You can't buy a pie
or go to the movies.
And, there are always people
denouncing you and cursing you.
Some say you had
a crazy Son who said
I am the Way and the Life.

We must all pray that
you never resign or become bitter.
As sad as things seem to be here,
without you they'd
be infinitely worse.
Thank God for God.
Stay in there buddy,
have a martini once in a while,
create a new universe.



"War Machine"

Artwork by Art Hazelwood

THE LAUGHING MAN

by Husayn Sayfuddiyn

He peered from his tower in the Darkland
gazing o'er the panoramic view
o'er the graves and stones that mark them
as what became of you.
Distant guns salute the legions of the dead and
Death's silent voice reveals the secrets of the grave
the flowing blood they've freely shed
is but the folly they now call brave
so laughed and laughed the Laughing man
laughing in the wind
to the drums of the goose-stepping marching band
that the killing anew begin
He laughs at the fears that dance
in the soon Killed In Action sons' eyes
at the dreams of glory and romance
that are nightmares in disguise
So laughs the Laughing Man
'til they command the invasion begin
when morality's banned and they no longer can
enjoin the conception of sin.
no war did anyone win
So you wonder who's the Laughing Man?
Loki? Djinn? Kalfu?
They're just your need to invent an Evil One
While the Evil One is YOU!
Praying for Deliverance from yourself
praying for food while food rots on a shelf
laughing at your "Scientific Master Plan"
for turning a world into a garbage can

Bring Back Our Children

by Mael Dinnell

Bring back our sons and daughters
Our merely girls and barely men
Not silent, draped in colors
But with whole lives to begin

They go in love unquestioning
For words like "right" and "free"
But the lies by which you take them there
Won't taint or go through me

If you want your war, so righteous
Then ship yourselves across the seas
Tote your own weapons; lose your own necks
To serve your evil, perverted needs:

My bonnie child, her children too
Won't trade their lives for death for you
Your wickedly acquired wealth,
Your vile lies, your theft, your stealth

While wind still blows, and rain still falls
I'll challenge every word you choose
To justify a cause not true
And warp our children's minds and views

Bring back our sons and daughters
Throw away your blood-etched lists
Of who dares see right through you
And may betray you with a kiss

The devil himself is angry
The devil even has needs
The devil even suffers
But you are solid greed

One child saved here or there
Is worth more than the stinking lot of you
And I won't rest while even one is left
To scream and suffer all for you

Like so much refuse, flesh and blood
You flush our children down the drain
As if they had no hearts, loves, dreams
And only for your wicked gain

The rage and hate I feel for you
Bone deep, out to my skin!
You will not bring our children home
And act as if they are yours to ruin!

You are so arrogant, evil and insane
I can only repeat Bob Dylan's refrain:
I see through your useless, heartless brains
Like I see through the water
That runs down my drain

Not Explained

by Joan Clair

So many beings knocked about —
animals, humans, trees.
Is it even possible to be
one with the sacred heart that bleeds,
profitless from death, destruction and disease?

A photo shows a small boy's body after death
bombed and blasted out of family, home
in his last breath.
His body looks at ease like an animal asleep,
but the expression on his face
begs some questions of the human race.

"Was this *my* fall from grace?"
"Did I a cross reject?"
"What knowledge did I have to be atoned?"

No karma can explain, no law of cause/effect,
his cry of innocence in pain, in death.

In the Still of the Night

by Husayn Sayfuddiyn

The Summer's siroccos blow the dust and sand
Over the silent night and no caravans
cross the winnowing dunes
that had once plied the Silk Road to Samarkand
silhouetted by the moon.
Siroccos dance like whirling Jinn and roars its angry might
then gone to leave silent, burnished bones, in the still of the night
Yet one can hear the maiden's tear dripping on the sand
and hear the love songs of Antar and the odes of old Khayyam
in the silent graveyards of Fallujah where only the wild dogs roam
scavenging the empty ruins, the dead had once called home.
In the Still of the Night the death squads emerge from hell
and stalks the silent dusty streets clanging a cracked Liberty Bell
slaughtering the protesters, that defiant voice they quell
while politicians on tv assuring, "All Is Well!"
In the Still of the Night where all's not calm or bright
Muffled cries from Abu Ghrayb stifled by the lying tongues of silence
and each dawning day to awake to the sounds of explosions and violence

The End of the World Will Be Streamed

by Eileen Corder

You will be able to stay home, User.
You will be able to plug in, dial up or go wireless.
You will be able to lose yourself on house payments and
Credit card bills, rush out for Red Bull during commercials
Because the end of the world can be streamed anywhere.

The end of the world will be streamed.
The end of the world will be brought to you by Haliburton
In 4 parts not counting the brown-outs.
The end of the world will show you pictures of Cheney
Reloading a shotgun and directing an initiative by
Donald Rumsfeld, Jack Abramoff and George Dubya
To sell all the real estate bought cheap in New Orleans.
The end of the world will be streamed.

The end of the world will be brought to you by the
ExxonMobile Masterpiece Theatre and will star
Ariel Sharon and the ghost of Yassar Arafat.
The end of the world will give your mind alternatives.
The end of the world will get rid of your energy crisis.
The end of the world will make you look like an innocent
Bystander, because the end of the world will streamed.

There will be pictures of you and Ken Delay
Dragging your shopping cart down the aisle of Walmart
And trying to stuff a 50" flat screen TV into your hybrid.
Fox will be able to predict the winner of the next
Presidential election two years in advance.
The end of the world will be streamed.

There will be pictures of mosques blowing sky high
In the instant replay.
There will be pictures of mosques blowing sky high
In the instant replay.
There will be cartoons of Hamas being run out of
Palestine by orders of the Knesset and the Quartet.
There will be slow motions and still lives of Stanley
Tookie Williams being strapped to a dentist's chair
And an awful lot of the sticking of needles
and the taping down of things.

Survivor, Extreme Home Makeover, and Lost
Will soar off the charts, and
The sale and promotion of the official news
Will not care if anyone gets mad because
The whole family will be sleeping it off with
Free samples of Lunesta while
The end of the world is being streamed.

There will be highlights on the newest
Blogs with pictures of hawks, doves and
Free-range chickens being mass slaughtered
Because it looks clean and efficient.
The theme song will be written by Woody Guthrie,
Chuck Jones, and sung by Dolly Parton and Eminem.
The end of the world will be streamed.

The end of the world will be right back after a bulletin
About your health insurance and retirement plan.
You'll no longer have to worry about a germ in the air,
A jet in the sky, or domestic wiretaps.
The end of the world will go better with a
Patriot Missile System. The end of the world will be
Paid for by your tax dollars. The end of the world will be
Customized in 0.014 seconds just for you.

The end of the world will be streamed, will be streamed,
Will be streamed, will be streamed.
The end of the world will be watched again and again
By robots in outer space.
The end of the world will preempt everything.



A light of hope in the heart of darkness. Candles shine the light of peace to dispel the darkness of war. Anna Graves photo

Death Singing to Young Men

by Julia Vinograd

Come lovers, leave your flesh-flower girls
weeping on mattress dents you made,
moaning through their sweaty curls.
I'll hold you closer as you fade,
black blood dancing on a blade
and you will stay where you are laid.

Come lovers to my singing worms.
Burn in my bed as a city burns
naked of clothes, naked of names.
In my arms there is no blame.
I'll hold you closer as you fade,
black blood dancing on a blade
and you will stay where you are laid.

Come lovers to my endless dance,
you won't leave me here alone?
Clutch your girl but feel my glance
then let me turn you into stone.
I'll hold you closer as you fade,
black blood dancing on a blade
and you will stay where you are laid.

Star Wars

by Julia Vinograd

The new Star Wars movie has opened
and I squeaked onto Section 8 housing
but I think the government would rather use my rent money
to buy light sabers for every soldier in Iraq.
There's no stars in the wars here, often no light.
Darth Vader sends out pink slips when factories close.
Why can't we have a soundtrack?
Boys who see Star Wars come out wanting to save the world
but walk past appeals for AIDS
and a drunken veteran in a wheelchair
sparechanging. His pants legs hang empty.
I can't help him either but I can make him a star.
In a galaxy far, far too near
he was going to be married.
She had red hair, freckles, no particular gift for silence
and she couldn't keep her hands off him.
His phantom limbs itch with the weight of her body,
there's not enough drink in the world to make him forget.
Sure, he stole his kid brother's train set once
and left it in their backyard beech tree.
The kid worshiped him, really it was sorta boring.
There'd been a job waiting
but not for a man in a wheelchair.
Can we put his face on a coffee mug or a t-shirt?
Once upon a time in a galaxy far, far too near
look what happens.
Where are the stars of peace?

Rivers of Blood

by Dianna Gwinn

On a conveyor belt of carnage and death
Flag-draped coffins glide silently by,
Hidden from view.

Sacrificial lambs fed to the false god
of insatiable greed and endless war;
Endless war for endless peace.
Hopes and dreams fade into mist.

Corporate spin-zone kicked the "Vietnam Syndrome"
No body bags on T.V. this time around.

Trapped in 1984, conditioned, unthinking, ignorant drones
Dwell in fear inside their living tombs.

Mindless murdering slaves chained in red, white and blue
Battle dark-skinned phantoms.
Emboldened by our silence and indifference to life
Rivers of blood flow.

Rivers of blood flow through the corporate spine
Immortal machine, shiny, cold and clean.
Out of sight and out of mind.
Rest in peace till the end of time, end of time.
Time to WAKE UP!

Street Vendor

by Ralph Dranow

Hey, come over here,
Take a look at these books.
I'll give you a good deal.
Reading books keeps your mind busy.
Everyone's mind needs exercise.
I'm just doing this
To make a little extra money.
I have a pretty good life.
I can't complain.
I got a place around the corner
And I got a beautiful wife.
With all the stupid things I done —
Drinking and everything —
I wouldn't of blamed her
If she left me a long time ago.
Someone's looking out for me.
My father was Vietnamese but
He was in the French Foreign Legion
In Vietnam back in the '50s.
They wanted me too
But I said: no way.
I went to Europe,
Lived there a long time,
Washed dishes, was a janitor,
Did all kinds of jobs.
Why should I kill innocent people
And maybe get killed myself?
After a soldier kills someone,
I don't see how he can
Eat or sleep at night.
War, politics, it's all crooked,
Just to screw the little man
like you and me.
Say, here's a deal for you,
Any two books for three bucks.

They Shook the Earth

by Fernando Venceramos Marqueda

Well
With the steps that they took
They shook the earth
On this day
At this time
When women
Took universal mutual power and control
The steps they took
Shook the day
Shook time
The women of this day
Did just that
They shook the day, they shook time,
This is what they did
The day known as monday
Monday was reclaimed
Its brand new wonderful name
The day of children
Yes this day
The first day of the week
The day of children now starts the week
The day of seniors
Is the second day of the week
The day of women
Is the third day of the week
Then
The day to end sexism
That is the fourth day of the week
The fifth day of the week
The day to end racism
The sixth day of the week
Well
Well the sixth day of the week,
It too has been reclaimed
The sixth day of the week is called
The day of fun
Then lastly, the seventh day
Know it now
By its brand new name
It is called, kick back
Yes the seventh day
Is called
Kick back day
Well
All
All new seven days
From the science of womenhood
They reclaim the day
They reclaim the time
They put significance to each day
So we all
Can think of each other
In unique and wonderful ways
It does
And it can
Help to make us all to feel better
Better towards each other
So we re-invent day
We re-invent time
We create a whole new
Humanity starting line
In this all our humanity
Well
To change the name of the day
We all change
We all change on how we
Address the day
Women say, women say
Look firm
Look deep
Well yes
The science of womenhood
Is only now beginning
Just beginning barely
Barely to breathe
Power and control
Now a universal mutual thing
Between
Man and women
Women and man
This is a dream,
this must…be…a…dream
I truly and most surely
Must be deep and fast asleep
Deep and fast asleep
Deep and fast asleep…
"honey…honey…
You better wake up; time for work."
What
What
What…oh no
It was a dream
It was a dream
Huh,
Hey honey, i really just had
The wildest most amazing dream
Honey
We have no time for it
This is
The wrong day
Hurry you'll be late
But honey
I had a most amazing wonderful dream
And for once it wasn't about me
Really
I had a most amazing wonderful dream!

In the region and shadow

by Chris Trian

I have seen so many die
that my address book
is a graveyard.
And the dead are as real as the living,
because they outnumber them.

Some crazy motor keeps me alive.
Anvil and forge,
I pound away at life.
I don't die.
Yet every day is a kind of death.
And none of my deaths
are kind.

They flay me, skin to bone,
like a rabbit,
and hang me up to dry in the sun.
There is too much sun these days.
It pounds down hard
on the heads of the people.

In the streets,
everyone is frightened.
Anvil and forge,
the machine is out of control.
The same machine that keeps me alive
seems to smash
and sweep so many away.

Is life death
or death life?
Can we ask questions
Bigger than we are?
Or must we ask them?
Every day like skinned rabbits
baking in the sun.
Not dead nor alive,
but somewhere in between.
Waiting for the cool night, and answers
that fly away like startled crows,
in the region and shadow.



Art by Chris Trian

**The Body of the World
lies dead and bleeding.
Will it be resurrected?
Will the stone of hope
be pushed from the door?**

Where does the soul go?

by Chris Trian

Where does the soul go
When the body is held hostage?
Where hides the mind
When thinking is against the law?
Where are the homeless taken
When the last homeless are sacrificed?
Where does the forest sleep
When the last tree is awakened?
Frog-marched out to the saw mill
For falling silently with no one listening.

Why *is* no one listening
When the roar of the world is deafening?
Why can no one see
When the world is choked with eyes?
Why are there so few "we's"
When we are hurting everywhere?
Why do we not cry out
When crying is the music of tomorrow?

Why do we take it and take it
When taking is the whole of the law?
Why can't we kill lies
When liars kill us by the thousands?
Why are we afraid of the roads
When their death wagons rove everywhere?
Why can't we be strong
When whatever doesn't kill us makes us stronger?

Where does the soul go
When only the soulless walk free?
Where is the prison of the living
When the churches are filled with the dead?
Where is the cross of time and space
When we have run out of both?
Why do children have everything
And lose it when they learn how to love?
Why are the lovers the soldiers
And what is worth fighting for?
Why is politics hate's secret language?
When it says peace, why *does* it mean war?

Decision

by Chris Trian

As I am,
neither Christ nor Devil,
but certainly
a good man and sinner.
As I am, confused
in this world of lepers
who think they are clean,
and clean women and men,
lost on the streets
in a leprosy of society.

In this world
where the sides
are being drawn
randomly like lots
because the people are fools
and take whatever
strikes their whim,
according to a drink,
a desire, a shot of
almost anything.
In this world of
Nazi against Jew,
Christian against Muslim,
Atheist against God,
Governments against citizens,
Men against women,
People with shelter
against those who have it not.

As I am
in this world,
I raise my cup
and light my candle,
and paint with
all the ferocity of life
bundled within a brush stroke.
I paint portraits.
I carve out of paint
and the music
of the dead,
the faces of the Spirits
of a race,
the human race,
pounding on the Bastille door
of the bureaucracy of reason.

And I paint women,
men, children,
the famous, infamous,
old and dying.
Each one is I.
Each one is homeless,
because the space in the heart
has been cordoned off
with yellow tape.
Detectives and police
photographers crowd the scene.
The Body of the World
lies dead and bleeding.
Will it be resurrected?
Will the stone of hope
be pushed from the door
of the heart valve
of tomorrow?

The Answer
is not decided.
The gods are mute.
God waits also
for the decision.
Free will was never taken.
But rests like
a crushed flower
in the sweaty hand
of a child.
An offering to a friend.
A gesture of love.
A road taken
for peace, not war,
as simply as a decision
made by the biggest
government on earth.

From the tiny to the huge
there is nothing
but decision.
As I am,
as we all are,
in this world,
which can always
be changed,
which can all ways
be changed,
which can,
in all ways,
be changed.

Metamorphosis

by Chris Trian

He shuffled up to the bench.
"Godanysparechange?"
He was rags and soot,
like a 19th Century
chimney sweep.
People looked right through him.
"I'm sorry," I said to him. "I'm broke too."
It was actually the truth.

He looked right through *me*,
as though I wasn't there.
Somehow, I felt I wasn't.
He snarled and swaggered
off down the wharf,
full of people and seagulls,
who squawked and shit
and waited for their dinner
from the hands of tourists.

Nobody seemed to be looking
at anything.
They played out whatever scenario
they were on,
squawking like the gulls,
and shitting all over everything.
They moved like oblivious ghosts.
A strange metamorphosis
seemed to have taken place.
They were a different species now.

It was as though everyone already died.
Like they dropped *all* the bombs,
and time got nuked.
And we were all on instant replay,
projected on the air.
Or holograms
of a deceased humanity,
on the inside of the outside
of the crystal skull
which counseled nothing
to nothing
for nothing.

The end of the world
happened last Tuesday.
Or was it a Tuesday
in the Middle Ages,
when the plague got everybody.
Or was it Tuesday in ancient Greece,
when Athens looted Sparta,
and Western Civilization
was born in blood and pillage.
Or Tuesday in some cave.
Or Tuesday in the trees,
or in a Paleozoic swamp.

Some imprecise Tuesday
when everything just stopped,
and a Cthonic metamorphosis
turned us into something *else*.
A simple mistake like the wrong road taken
away from love
into fear and death.
And everything afterwards
would be just a re-enactment
on the stage of a future
not to be.

Now we're just markers,
marionettes of mind control.
No one seeing or knowing
or caring.
The man behind the curtain
is nothing but a desert.
And in a black room,
mad men toast
the crime of all time.
That people gave all their money
for the pigeon drop of hope.

But then I'm just a paranoid.
A sociopath, a poet.
And the metamorphosis
is the melting of my liberal brain cells
due to drugs or age,
or too much desperate love.
Nothing untoward is happening.
Everything is just fine.
Jesus will come through the clouds
any second now.

The truth is as obvious
as a hot dog at a ball game.
Only Pat Robertson
has not gone
mad.
And the Communist intellectuals
must be rounded up
and shot.



A long line of homeless men sleep on a row of park benches in New York City.

Photo by Dong Lin from his book *One American Reality* published by Cypress Press

Anonymous

by Michael Creedon

Nobody recognizes me. Nobody knows I'm here.
All they see is a man in raggedy clothes, looking
like a man with a turkeybone stuck in his throat.
My clodhoppers are about two sizes too big,
I need the room for my swollen toes.
I don't need to walk;
I just keep my hand stuck out.
Down the street there's another man
looks just like me
but we would play the Everly Brothers on TV.

The reason I stand here is I got nowhere to go.
I sleep in a doorway where the rain don't go.
I got myself a sleeping bag many years ago.
Where I hide it, don't nobody know.
I know people look down on me
like I look down on people in magazines and TV.
Just like me they got nowhere else to go
but they're going there faster and
they just don't know.

Be nice to have a bed to sleep in
and a woman to cuddle.
Everything is possible, or so they say.
Hey buddy, got a spare cigarette?
Yeah, I didn't think so — neither do I.

retreat, no shelter

by Randy Fingland

glistening off
the spun glass
of report
that life outdoors
has its attraction
is the dew point
detracting
from body heat
rapidly
under an army
surplus blanket
while still fully
clothed
including my overcoat
buttoned totally

my bones become glacial
muscular responses
under
the command of this
chilled mind
in this only body
suffering under the frozen
surface I call my skin

Just Before Dawn

by Michael Creedon

At 4:30 in the morning when I get up
it's a pretty good time of the day.
The city's pretty much asleep
like when I used to work graveyard
and you can pretend
you're the only man in the world.

But there are other people
wishing they could sleep
and while I'm wearing two coats
and a hood,
they don't even have one coat,
and I have gloves
and they have arthritis at 40 degrees.
I'm at peace meditating
and they're shaking like skeletons
in clothes from Victoria's Secret.
Yeah, all dressed up to climb K-2,
in holey old Converses, no socks,
worn thin jeans, a rummage sale
Blondie's teeshirt, old flannel shirt
buttoned to the collar, a car-wash
towel for a scarf, and a stocking cap
pulled down over the ears.
What would this man give for a
cigarette and a steaming cup of
coffee with lots of sugar?

So I include him in my meditation and
hope he doesn't freeze before dawn.

If We Get to Eat Today

by Michael Creedon

A little old lady with white hair
and bronze iron skin holds out a
spindly, shaky arm, hand clenching
for money from passers-by. A rangy
guy with a gray beard and granny
glasses leans sitting back against a
lightpole, legs sprawled out in jeans
in front of him, chanting "spare
change, spare change." Once in
awhile I stop and we smoke together.
The big policeman on his bike rides by.
The clock in the sky says noon
but lunch isn't getting here soon
for the pocketless people who stand
and wait for luck.

Wouldn't Mexican food taste good
or any kind of food at all?
We're not dressed up and we've got
no place to go. Outside of BART
the penniless come and go.
It's been a long long time since
popcorn and coke in a matinee show.
But the hands up in the sky
keep mercilessly circling by
and we'll be pretty luck
if we get to eat today.

Ignored by America

by Mary Perkins

Ignored by America while starving to death in America.
Ignored by America while going blind or deaf in America.

Ignored by America when the horrors of war have seeped into the mind and spirit of so many young men and women and haunt their waking and sleeping hours.

Ignored by America when sleeping in the street in sub-zero weather.

Ignored by America while having an epileptic seizure in front of the California Human Services Agency, with no one to help you and no health insurance.

Ignored while you hobble on the street, pushing the shopping cart that contains your life's possessions. Ignored by America when you push your cart, with braces on both legs from wars that you fought to save American freedom.

Ignored by America when it takes you 5 minutes to cross the street because you are tired, blind and disabled and no one is stopping to help you cross the street.

Ignored when you sleep at night near the railroad tracks or in a shelter or near the bus station or in any covered space.

Ignored... ignored...

Ignored by others who pass you daily, and who seem to perceive you as if you were some type of human being who just couldn't handle realty.

Ignored, discounted, feared and scorned...

What words do YOU think of when YOU see a person who is homeless and indigent? What labels do YOU place on the poverty of your fellow American citizen?

If YOU were poor, what labels would your friends and neighbors place on YOU?

How would YOU like to be labeled poor, indigent and unhelpable?

How would YOU like to be completely ignored by YOUR fellow Americans?

Coffee and a Smoke

by Michael Creedon

The morning's daggers
pierce the skin
as the sun begins to open
on another night
spent mostly in the rain.

The people of the street
begin to emerge
from the little alleys and doorways
and cracks in the walls.

It will take a while to get the
antifreeze out of the bone marrow.
At 10 a.m., the pressing needs now are
very hot coffee and a strong cigarette.

Start the process, ask people
for a little money or a cigarette.
You can see the bulging wallets and
the stream of smoke from their mouths.
But so few care about your need.
Very few people seem to GIVE.

I don't want the Kingdom of Heaven.
I mean, it sounds very good,
but I need coffee and a smoke.

Hats

by Michael Creedon

Life is the wizard
that can snatch our hats and
replace them with hats unknown
so we must hang onto our hats
yet we must let them go
for this is life's way of
revealing the path we must follow.

I know a guy who sits on
Shattuck Avenue all day calling,
"spare change, spare change,"
so I thought that was his way,
to wear only one hat —
a simple way to go.
But lately we've been talking —
he's an educated man — and
as we speak he changes hats.
Now when I can
I give him some change
and I always stop to talk.
He's a fascinating man
and he knows this stage of his path.
He has no shame
and when I leave
he claps his main hat on,
and I revert to mine.



A woman searches for food in a trash can in the wealthiest nation on earth. Photo by Dong Lin from *One American Reality*

Why Me

by Michael Creedon

I give myself a little slice of heaven
(which is not far away)
when I remember to,
but they're shriveling up and dying
in the streets & doorways & bushes
every single day that goes by.
What have I got to be so happy about
but I'm happy at least part of each day

Why isn't it me?
I broke most of the laws.
I never had any money.
People thought I acted funny.
I never changed my socks.
I spent days in beds and jails
and detoxes and treatment centers,
years in halfway houses and floors
of filthy trailers,
daily stealing my food and booze.

But I didn't die.
I found a higher ground.
I started opening my eyes.
What pushed me?
I just couldn't stand it any more.

At the Library

by Sue Ellen Pector

One day at the San Francisco library
I walked into the bathroom.
A wide-open stall
exposed a black woman
in her twenties —
she stood,
menstrual blood dripping from her.

Catching my eye she said,
"Sometimes I wish I could fly away,
just fly away."

I stood frozen for long moments.

Odd interaction ours,
she bleeding and in pain, I
understanding
— at least —
her physical pain.

Worlds apart, she
homeless, I
remembering a time
I was nearly so,
we connected.

At sad moments,
she comes to mind as I
yearn to fly away.

In the Heat of the Ghetto

by Husayn Sayfuddiyn

The languorous night creeps on
The wailing choir practices at the church
Children choosing a star to dream upon
Old Joe's woman's left him in the lurch
In the Midsummer's Night
In the heat of the ghetto
Neighborhoods of chains
Self constrained archipelago
On White Washed Black frames
mutilated self acceptance
and seats on the sidewalk
from where you're jailed if you don't bail
or squawk
while stealing and cheating are survival skills
while the D Boys roll and the Whores stroll
and the ill sell their pills
as the jail cells are filled
In the Heat of the Ghetto
Where all you can Get is No
Survival on chump change and Street Know How
A game you can't seem to let go now.
In the Heat of the Ghetto
Along all its Dead End Streets
The future is awaiting you
on your exclusive sidewalk seats…

Clean

by Michael Creedon

The final float-in
of the evening sun.
Shelters being sought
for those who haven't got.
The drug trade shoots up a notch
for those who would fly high:
crack and speed and
weed and smack
all at a nominal price.

This is the Underground, but
visible if you know how to look.
Myself, I do avoid it;
I've already eaten the hook.
When the miracle occurred
and the hook came out
the hidden resources emerged
and I stand before you clean.

A Desperate Lady

by Maureen Hartmann

A young lady
who looked desperate,
with an attempted smile
that looked like a frown
asked me for money.
I offered to buy her milk
or a soda like the one
I had in my hand.
She said, "Can you give me
the quarter?"
I answered, "I'm sorry, I don't
like to give out money."
She said, "I'm sorry." As if
apologizing for troubling me.
Who knows? Maybe she
was trying to accumulate money
to get something to eat.
I should have talked to her longer.

Addicted to Crackdowns

by Garrett Murphy

Do you have a craving to punish simply because you can?
Do you desire death penalties for looking out of the ordinary?
Does the notion of collective punishment send you into ecstasy?
Do you crave fantasies of maximum-security prisons
for accidental littering?
If any of the above describes you,
You may be...

ADDICTED TO CRACKDOWNS!

But not to worry,
We have a brand new group for you:

Crackdownies Anonymous !

And you need not worry about exposition of your identity on the part of our organization (of course, we cannot assume responsibility for your identity being revealed by your own blatant acts of addiction).

Crackdownies Anonymous is especially recommended for: bosses, parents, police, judges, prosecutors, presidents, governors, school superintendents, principals, and administrators of all stripes, and anyone else drunk on their authority.

Crackdown addiction is not easy to overcome; indeed it is the most sought-after and popular addiction by far, having long surpassed love addiction in its appeal, and food addiction in its difficulty to overcome. Other addictions trail far behind.

Crackdownies Anonymous is still in its infancy; hence, studies have yet to be completed concerning its effectiveness. However the time is long overdue for an organization such as this; our prisons, shelters, and asylums are full of far too many casualties of crackdown addiction, and there are many casualties out on the street as well.
And
YOU
may already be one of them, never mind knowing one.

Join *Crackdownies Anonymous!*
Crack down on Crackdowns!

Ten Commandments

by Ralph Dranow

John Kerry and George Bush,
They're members of a secret society,
The rich man's club.
Kerry said he's for the poor
And the workingman
But that's just what he said
To get elected.
What' s the answer?
It's simple:
The Ten Commandments,
The most profound words ever written.
If every one of us followed
The Ten Commandments,
There wouldn't be any war
And any rich and poor.
I don't follow the Ten Commandments.
I lie and steal.
I want to do the right thing
But I can't afford to.
Look, if I tell the Welfare Department
The complete truth
I lose my crummy little hotel room
And I'm out on the street,
Freezing my ass off.
I know lying is a sin
But what choice do I have?
Original sin,
That's what we're up against.

Street Fight

by Julia Vinograd

"You don't even know my name,"
he screamed after them, clutching his side
where they'd kicked him into a hurting ball
huddled against a closed warehouse.
"But my name knows you," he went on
as if they were still standing on the corner
their boots turned before I got there.
"My name knows all about you.
My name will rise up in your throats
till you can't breathe except to vomit
and can't vomit except to scream
and can't scream anything except my name
till they take you away, dope you up
to make you quiet, and in that quiet,
my name will eat your guts in small delicate bites,
taking all the time in the world
and then, yes, then you'll know my name."
He started coughing and doubled over.
I walked closer, trying to imagine a question.
He noticed I was there and shook his head.
"I've taken care of it," he said quietly,
almost smiling. "Go away. I've got worse bruises
falling down drunk. They'll heal.
For the rest, you didn't hear anything
and you don't believe a word."
I opened my mouth and closed it again.
The moonlight caught his eyes.
I left, not looking back.

Death of the Father

by Michael Creedon

Well there's a Northwest wind arising,
it's been blowing all night long.
It's singing 'bout the death of my father.
That's the song I'll be singing today.

I sat down to write the eulogy
but it didn't come out like I meant.
It's pretty hard to put in sentences
a life so deeply lived.

On the street the boys'll be chattering,
doped up and having a good time
making eyes at the girls
in their American skin,
shaking it up and looking so fine.

The panhandlers chant their
mantra in the wind
and there's nothing wrong with that.
But if it was me, I'd be chanting
"Hot Pastrami"
cuz I know it's the end of time.

I read in a book by Theodor Reik
the most important event in a woman's life
is the birth of her first child.
The same damn book said the most
important moment in a grown fella's life
is the death of his old man.

The wind is coming up,
the kids are playing on the street.
The horses are running wild.
I got a crazy feeling I'm about to
experience the death of my first child.

If There's A Tomorrow

by Michael Creedon

When you're sitting by death's bed
and the people in the next cubicle
have "The Gong Show" on too loud and
you're trying to make out your father's
rusty words in your ear,
there's a moment of truth in that.

And all along the watchtower
barefoot maidens weep —
crying not for death but for the ordeal of life
and the illusion in which we live.
Then you think of where you were
day before yesterday, chatting with
good old Bill in his wheelchair,
sparechanging it on BART Square on
Shattuck Avenue, a million miles from
nowhere, and you hope old Bill is okay on
his voyage — life is very hard for him —
and you're back in the hospital room
where they're closing up shop for the night,
and as the room clears, your father
calls you back to the deathbed and says,
suddenly lucid, "Michael, kiss me on
the lips," and you do, and he says,
"We've waded some deep waters together."
And you say,
"Yes, but you've always been there,"
and go home and wait
to see if there's a tomorrow.

Bad, Bad Morning

by Michael Creedon

Can't sleep.
Aches and pains and cold.
Someone warm come and take me away.
Doesn't look like it's going
to be a sunny day.

Yes, it's a very fine day;
the cold has gone away.
I've had coffee and cigarettes and food.
I've turned over my infection to God.
Things are going to be okay.

I think about all the people
much more infected than me.
They don't have a roof to go home to.
It seems it would kill me living that way.

I have a fear that tomorrow
will be like morning today.
It takes so long for the pain to let up
and pills for which I can't afford to pay.

Art by Christa Occhiogrosso



Omega Wolf

by James Storey

Last of a dying breed
Surviving as your own entity
Bred to survive alone
Instincts can drive to prevail, survive
No other options
going it alone.

Kicked out of the pack a long time ago.

Among the predators of this world.
There's no safety in numbers.
An Omega wolf fights and survives,
hunting, running, scavenging alone.

Always on the run, and greatly
misunderstood, Omega keeps on
running—surviving, winning, fighting.

Trekking in the lone dreary
wilderness of modern-day chaos
and trying to find solace

Omega wolf, mighty within its own
pack, always searching, roaming,
remaining strong

Solo Guardian of the East
Omega, you're the last to stay strong,
protector of the true pack
to run with God.

Omega wolf, someday you who were
made last will soon be made first,
protector guardian of all.

Because like the Alpha and the Omega
there has to be a beginning and
the end of every struggle
and a new birth to a new everlasting
progression to lead a pack of your own
When last will eventually come in first.
Omega wolf perseveres and endures
without fear of being the true leader
of the pack, a leader of one's own.

Miss You

by Michael Andrew Glaros

Time spent away from you
It looms so large
I miss you — miss you
I have gotten to dance with you
Touch you as we swirl
Can you hear me whisper that
I miss you — miss you

Lone Tree

by James Storey

There you stand
A silhouette in the night
gracefully gazing out
in the aerial immensity
Filtering out modern society
Keeping me company.

Branches reaching out as
arms of comfort in times
of uncertainty.

Lone tree, an old soul from the past
A reminder to be steadfast.

Lone tree in the concrete valley
Do you miss the green valley and
your home among ancient groves?

Lone tree you patiently await
the rains which bring life to your
pores and make you strong.
The sunshine you welcome at
the beginning of dawn.

Lone tree you bring life to me
as I stand alone looking for my
Ancient grove.

Red bark, brown branches, green
pine needles, beauty that only the
eyes, nose and touch can behold.

When I have fallen and gone under
the soil — you will still be standing
strong, a lone tree longing for home.

Windswept Winter

by Michael Andrew Glaros

Windswept winter chill
billowing icy flecks of numbness
looming clouds heavy with moisture
recede with their turmoil
fresh sprouts of life — nature
emerges… as does the sun
warmth radiating the soul
cheer present in flights of birds
open petals of brilliant colors
sweep the last of winter
— away

Dad

by Michael Creedon

I acted so well
after my father died
and tried to support my mother.
But now sometimes I cry and cry.
I'll never have another,
not like you, dad.

Fool to Cry

by Michael Creedon

My wise friends tell me
I'm a fool to cry.
So I get out my old blues harp
and I cry the blues,
cuz, daddy, they're right.
"Daddy, you're a fool to cry."
The whole wide universe
is going my way.
My father just died
and I'm proud to be his son
and it's natural to cry,
but, daddy, I'm a fool to cry
cuz now you're always with me.

I worry sometimes about money
but I don't believe in hell
except the one we're living in,
which we do a lot to create ourselves.
I don't believe in the Bush man
though he seems to thrive on death.
I'm too old for war.
When they called me when I was 19
I simply refused to go.
Still I'm a fool to cry
for the slaughterhouse there
and the slaughter on my streets.
They've cornered us like rats
and now they're closing in.

How Old Is She?

by Joan Clair

"Hi, old dog," the woman shrieks.
"How old is she? How old is she?"
I reply, "As old as you.
As old as me, as we are seen
as two old hags by those
in chains of their mortality.
Though they would never say,
'Hello, old hag,'
we know that's what they think."

"Therefore, first see the joy
she feels in seeing you, then
her outgoing spirit sharing love,
her uncontaminated trust,
and only then see her
as an old dog, if you must.
And let that be the same for us."

Each Sound I Say

by Michael Creedon

Each goodbye you might say,
wounding word, bright and gay,
gives you a chance
before things go black.
Casual conversation counts too.
Making jokes isn't a bad thing to do.
Sometimes you can't help
feeling blue.
So you can't prepare ahead.

What does consciousness do?
Is the supernatural real?
What are those feelings we get
when we see a certain painting
or read a special poem
or sink down under the sea?

When I meditate
and all the words clear away,
what is that sound,
or is there a sound,
or soundless secret I say?

Some Mother's Son

by Aisha Rafeeq-Swan

yea... I feel the vibration from the earth as it moves up under me, thru me and oh so gently the rhythm of life shakes my being as i come into... more and more

I wonder, China, Indonesia, Iraq, Mexico, and all the beautiful countries of the world... do people there feel these vibrations of mother earth's calling to life and longing... vibrations for peace and wholeness and love...

or

are mothers too busy frantically gathering up the bones and flesh of their crushed children, wailing to the skies a pain no one can imagine... children, killed by bombs painted with names and smiles... can you feel her?

no names and smiles here... people moving, busy, can't see, can't feel... only irritation at those who get in their way

yo, a man walks down the busy city streets, briefcase in hand, yea... european-fitted suit... thinks he's going somewhere... an old homeless woman, who always tries to get his attention every day as he walks his imperial beat, jumps up and down in front of him waving her arms: "i'm here, here i am, can't you see me?? can't you see me??" The man brushes the old woman off, irritated by her weakness, by her poverty, by her homelessness, angered at her asking for a bit of time, a bit of food, a bit of money... angered, he shoves her away a little too hard... she points a tapered aged finger at him and screams, "you WILL SEE"... the man suddenly is frozen in mid-footstep... he screams in terror,."old woman, you witch what have you done???" He frantically tries to move, but cannot... in fear he begins to cry... but his tears fall as stones... the old woman stands frail, wrapped in multicolored shawls, face saddened and weathered, but beautified by the hardships of those tested most by life itself. The man in his fear looks down — finally — at this old woman who has been following his footsteps day after day year after year... he looks into the eyes and face of this old homeless, useless... "MOM????" the man, suddenly mobile, falls to his knees weeping... "I didn't know... I didn't know it was you. I thought you were living in our hometown... I thought you were just some old homeless person... I..."

The mother looks at her child — grown, successful (?) and now in a pitiful state as his heart is ripped thru his chest and appears to be coming thru his throat in bits and pieces... "my son, if only you would have listened to the calling of those of us on the streets, the calling of the angels, if only you would have taken the time to look, you would have seen your mother in need, in search of a gentle touch, a sound of compassion instead of the endless clicking of shoes passing by, in a hurry to get nowhere... if only you had nourished the seed of love in your heart, instead of chasing illusions... this is the real world, an ether place where anyone can end up at any time, a place where angels and devils linger, you did not see me, you do not see any of us..."

As the man wept, his Mother put her hand on his head... 40 some years ago she remembers the birth pains, as a child comes into the world crying loudly... now the birth pains are his, as he sits, scrunched up, weeping uncontrollably... she begins to walk away, almost floating... he reaches out to her, calling for his mother, louder, but she cannot turn to him, her mission is completed... she floats away and above into celestial realms... the man's cries and wails getting fainter....
she is everyone's mother... do you see her?

One day, the world became gray, silent... the golden gate bridge stood in the distance... fog hailed the tinted hues of red and gold... people walked, confused... no buildings, no stores, no apparent city... some walked in heels and stylish dresses, expensive handbags, some in suit & tie, clean-shaven, some wandered in tattered clothes, barefoot, dirty, hungry, some walked wrapped in blankets carrying young babies fast asleep, or dead, some smelled of perfume, some of filth and body odor... but they all walked together with the golden gate in the distance...barren land, a place of only grays and faint tans... no colors could be seen...

some walked in confusion, some walked in fear, some just walked the vibe as they did every day in silence, eyes met eyes... and finally, all were on equal ground... there was nowhere to go, no one to impress, no one to look down upon, for apparently something much worse has happened... was it a nuclear bomb? why didn't anyone tell them?? were they too fast asleep in their slumbered dreams?? What happened?? those who had began to cry, and it was those who had not who comforted them...

the grayness continued, the city gone, they gathered together for survival and began to talk to one another... they shed tears, huddled in mixed groups — the have and the have nots — it took a gray, lifeless day to equalize all peoples on one plane of truth... visit them on canvas, where they still reside together as one family, today,.if you look closely, you can see the beginning of life, opening hearts, hints of hues, colors returning....

meanwhile, in other places, bombs are still exploding... bright intense colors of fire and hatred killing... angels weep at the sight of the world... while those in power turn a whiter shade of chalk, hoping to demarcate lines and cross boundaries — creating hell... they go off golfing, horseback riding, to dinner parties... are they really humans? or visitors from outer space sent to destroy this world, as in the twilight zone...

yea... i feel the vibration of the earth's movement thru me... it shakes my soul and awakens my reality....

I think i'll go down to that old abandoned warehouse and see that canvas everyone is talking about... i hear it's quite an experience... no one knows who painted it... it's supposed to be scary... they tried to remove it, but nothing can get the paint off, they tried to cover it, but it seeps thru... some even fear getting sucked into the painting... strange, huh... i hit you up later... inshallah

Classically Dressed — and Homeless

by Mary Perkins

I see you, gently wandering through a well-heeled suburban town. You are classically dressed in black, your hair held by a black headband. You are towing your few life's possessions behind you in two luggage racks. I have wondered who you are and how you ended up homeless.

You have the look of an upper-middle-class matron, someone who might have had a well-connected husband, a home that was impeccably designed, with tall gates to keep out those who you did not wish to see or who did not fit into your perfect life. You look as if you had a membership at all the exclusive country clubs.

You simply have that look, well-bred and coiffed, carefully dressed, despite your state of homelessness. Your finely boned face has classic, timeless lines and grace. You walk straight ahead, not glancing at anyone in that suburban town that you might have shopped in once, tumbling your children out of an expensive car to get ice cream and the week's groceries. Perhaps you once walked in that town to get your hair and nails done, greeting friends from the church, the club and the PTA while you stopped, for a moment, for a cup of tea and a scone.

Yes, you have that look that you and so many other wealthy or once-wealthy women wear so well, like a shield that seems to protect you, but never does.

Do your old friends and neighbors and children ignore you now? Do they stop and ask you how you are, or if they can help you? How do you cope with their stares, their heads turning from you as you wander through the town? Does your former husband know where you are? Does he ever help you? How do you cope with the vast distance that now encompasses you?

How do you cope with the hundreds of daily looks from everyone who used to know you, with their suspicious glances that say, "Oh, look how far down she has gone, just look. I used to know that woman… No dear, look away, look away, she might see us and want to talk. Move over there, into that store, quickly, avoid her… avoid her."

Homeless people in America come from all economic spectrums, and have had lives that have been rich, middle-class and poor. They, and we, are all nationalities, all religions, have disabilities. All need your help to pull themselves away from the awful place that they have found themselves in — that of dire, unstoppable poverty and homelessness.

What special set of eyes, other than the eyes that we were all given, does it take to see those who are homeless? What special kind of heart does it take to help someone remove themselves from homelessness?

Why do so few people seem to have that kind of special heart? Why?

My Travelin' Man

by Joy Bright McCorkle

Born in the backseat of a '35 Chevrolet, he traveled following the crops.
In his twenties, he hitchhiked to Japan and the Eastern seaboard.
He hitchhiked to Alaska with a broken leg in his thirties and parts between.
By plane, by car, by train, by foot he went from homeless shelter to homeless shelter,
Never having housing for more than a few months.
Now he has shelter, but at what price?

The smell of disinfectant assaulted the hair follicles of my nose.
I recognized the pungent colorless gaseous alkaline compound of ammonia.
My nose hairs twitched like a cat's whiskers investigating a new place.
The lingering smell of urine with just a slight whiff of feces mixed with Pine Sol perfumed the clean halls.

The facility looked modern and clean. I noticed the small flowers on the clean wallpaper, starkly contrasted to the withered flesh staring at me from watering eyes; eyes clouded over with cataracts and boredom.

What would I find behind the door of room 23, bed 2?
I stopped walking down the long corridor leading to his room.
I breathed deeply to regain my composure and found my mind fascinated with the cherry small rosebuds on the wallpaper.

When I entered room 23, he was fitfully sleeping.
I sat quietly in the corner of the room.
Now he has housing, I thought, a roof over his head,
rescued from the rain and cold by total incapacitation.

He wanted to die in the north woods where the wolves and carrion would recycle his body.
He never got there, his drive for survival too strong.
In pain, he sought out the medical profession.
He wanted to live. He woke with a smile of recognition in his dull blue eyes.
His sparkle was gone!

High on methadone, he couldn't remember what exactly was wrong with his body.
High on methadone, he didn't feel the pain.
Proudly he told me he hadn't had a drink in two years, since he was admitted.
Proudly he told me he was on Hospice Care.
"I've got money; get me a car so I won't die in this place."
There wasn't time.
He died that week surrounded by fragile folk, not me.
Now he has housing. He'd hate it. Now his ashes sit behind books on my bookcase.

Someday, I'll get to the north woods and scatter his ashes. The wolves won't eat him but the bears, wolverines, birds, and insects will carry his body to parts unknown.
Then he'll travel again.

He Stripped Me

by Joy Bright McCorkle

Sitting alone, lonely in my solitude, I looked at my jewelry box
Remembering.

Remembering the diamond ring... one carat in the middle.
Remembering the $1,500 squash blossom Navajo necklace.
Remembering the golden ring, white gold, yellow gold and rose gold.
Earrings to match... I remembered.

He stripped me. It took him years, but he stripped me.
He loosened my blouse, my pants, and my scarf.
Naked, I stood before him.... My love, my husband.

Looking back, he stripped me of everything but my humanity.
It took him years to peel away my laughter.
He was methodical, handsome, witty, and talented.
But he stripped me of my wealth, my profession, my home, my sanity.

When all that was left was a hollow shell of my former self, I fled.

Now my jewelry box is empty. My home is now furnished in
Salvation Army bargains. I have no radio, no tape recorder and no credit.
He stripped me.
It was all stuff. Stuff I could live without but I remember better times.

I didn't know how addiction could strip me of everything,
although it was not my addiction.
I understood that addiction strips the addict of everything.
I was naive. I didn't know it strips those who love the addict.

Now I have a roof, a home. It is sparsely furnished but it's mine.
I have a cat that comforts me. I'll always miss him; I'll miss the good times.

Now his ashes sit on my bookshelf, waiting the time I can set his remains free.
How can a woman love a man who left her naked and homeless?
The mind and heart are eerie things. They choose to forget so much and yet
there are times they remember.

Beautiful Women

by Joy Bright McCorkle

We're beautiful wise women if you look beyond the scars.
We're beautiful sage women who have seen too many stars.
Not the stars given to every common man,
But a spectrum of bright colors, exploding bursts of light;
not accidental but from our loved one's might.
Long gone are our abusers, but the memories remain.
Sorry about that, but we fear men and we fear pain.
We now are celibate from fear and remorse.
We wish we had the love but we've chosen another course.
Look at us young children, don't go where we have been.
We've loved into disaster and that's a royal sin.
Beware the bad boys — they know how to fight.
They use their strength against us — showing us their might.
Each of them exciting but drugs let the demons loose.
Deplorable old laws stopped them from hanging from the noose.
Years we spent being loyal, forgiving their abuse.
Now we have our art, our writing gives us our use.
Now we are old women, living all alone.
Not because we fear them but still loving them to the bone.

Waiting for Help

by Mary Perkins

He sits, waiting for help from someone, anyone, at a bus stop. His life, his belongings, are in a shopping cart, covered with plastic .

He sits, waiting.
No one helps.

She sits, waiting for help from someone, anyone, in front of a grocery store, her belongings in a shopping cart, covered with plastic.

She sits, waiting for help.
No one helps.

He walks barefoot in winter, in San Francisco, a smile on his face, asking for nothing. He is ignored by everyone shopping and working downtown.

At that time, I could afford to give a man who had no shoes, money to buy them. I gave this man money to buy shoes. He thanked me. What he did with the money I do not know. I could not bear to see a man walking without shoes in the winter, particularly when he was ignored by so very many people, most of whom were carrying shopping bags filled with junk they did not need.

He sits, waiting for help from someone, anyone, in a city park, his belongings in a shopping cart, covered with plastic.

He sits, waiting.
No one helps.

Americans are blind to the poverty that surrounds them. This is a chosen blindness to intense, life-threatening poverty. Why have Americans grown to be so blind, or have they always been blind to poverty that their fellow residents face?

Millions of homeless Americans sit waiting for help from someone, anyone.
But no one helps.

What does this say about America and Americans?

Shelter From The Shelter

(or "Little Hitlers")

by Gary Peterson

"You make it last!" "You make it last!" the irate man shouted repeatedly. He ran a hotel for the homeless and other members of the fringe and he assumed this gave him the right to rant and dump on us at will.

He treated his family the same way.

I had asked for an extra roll of toilet paper, having run out the night before. Logical, but his anger knew no bounds. "You make it last! You make it last!" he shouted. And, as there was no one else to shout at, he exhibited the worst sort of behavior — a social climber who, having gained a foothold on the American Dream, was going all the way to the top to join the other capitalist pigs at the feeding trough.

I had met his kind before in Berkeley on the weekend of my daughter's wedding. Another immigrant innkeeper with an Alexander Haig complex. He wanted ID, then he wanted more ID. He couldn't wait to enforce the so-called "Patriot Act." He was in charge, after all, and I was only an old hippie looking for a non-smoking room. In Berkeley, there were farms, maybe, but non-smoking rooms were for wimps. When I couldn't provide him with a DNA sample, he threatened to call the police and I went on to stay elsewhere, fascinated nonetheless by this oppressed man out oppressing his oppressors.

The worst part of being homeless isn't depending on others for a place to stay and food in your stomach. It's the incessant degradation — being treated as a subhuman by every small-minded creature in creativity. As the saying goes, the people you hated in high school run the world. And they do, they do.

Let's give the worst example first: the infamous "ass crack patrol." In this scenario — and I am not making this up — several male shelter staff members, sometimes joined by a really kinky female staff member, take flashlights and go bed to bed, preferably at three in the morning, when everyone and their ass cracks are asleep. To do this repeatedly all night long can land one in what Pat McDonald (of Timbuk 3) once called "The Asshole Parade." Do it they did, checking to make sure no one's ass was showing, even under the covers. So much for being made in God's image. Doesn't he or she or it have an ass crack too? Did Jesus have one? Doesn't everyone? Let he who is without sin cast the first flashlight beam.

The puritanical heritage of America, the one that says the human body is evil while right-wing religious zealot mass murderers are good, ruled the day as the ass crack patrol went forth to protect us from our own ass cracks. One is reminded of Dan Aykroyd refrigerator repairman on "Saturday Night Live," oblivious to the fact that his is showing.

The zeal of the ass crack patrol is unequalled. "Excuse me, sir, but the women in bed 87 across this vast and wide former airplane hangar says she saw your ass crack at 2:15 a.m." They always get their man, woman or child.

But this is a minor bit of insanity compared to the daily digging that takes place in a homeless shelter. Just showing up will suffice. You're obviously guilty of something. Franz Kafka had nothing on these people.

While many shelter workers at any given shelter are gems and fair-minded, never forget that it is the few, the proud, the aberrations who stand out from the crowd.

Take one staff member who feared intelligence. Any word with more than two syllables was suspect. One time I talked too long and too enthusiastically (not being inclined to accept the televised opiate of the people) with a fellow client. If we'd been watching WWF and cheering like drunken billy goats, it would have been alright. We were taken aside and told we could not talk (i.e., carry on an intelligent conversation) in the kitchen. Then, in the hall. And, later, in the front room, we heard we could only talk outside. So much for the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and the rest of the Bill of Rights.

The same dim-witted gatekeeper once screamed irately at me for discussing Theodore Roosevelt with a fellow inmate. I tried, somewhat calmly, to explain that this was a former President of the United States who actually belongs on Mt. Rushmore, unlike a later President who only thought he was playing a part anyway. She just kept yelling: "What you talking about? What you talking about?" and struggling to pronounce a Dutch name longer than two syllables.

It must have been a commie plot, just like that Bill of Rights, which any shelter worker can assure you does not cover you in your reduced circumstances.

Another overblown power monger delighted in yelling at us: "Get off the phone, now!" He screamed incessantly as I tried to discuss a problem with my son. I had permission to use the phone from my case worker. I was on my calling card. But, talking uninterrupted to your children is a privilege, not a right. Being homeless disqualified me.

Another staffer with a brain smaller than a brontosaurus let a little power go to his (little) head. He accused me of making the wash list fall behind. (I had plotted this one all night after one too many visits from the ass crack patrol, of course.) Never mind that there was only one working dryer and a waiting list. It was, obviously, my fault. And the fact that I had spent 8 hours in the hospital emergency room that day with edema, walked with a walker cane, and could barely do so, let alone go from room to room, didn't matter.

This troglodyte ordered me to fetch him something without the use of my cane, which he was going to confiscate should I ever misplace it again. He put me on notice that he would be watching me and counting the seconds the next time I signed up to do laundry. How dare I run five minutes behind my allotted hour due to the dryer backup. Heaven forfend we should pass up the chance to belittle another. It's a fringe perk of the job.

And we mustn't forget the "Little Hitler" who one day yelled at me for stepping out on the porch/balcony. (I like the air and watching planes land gives me a sense of unbounded freedom.) But that wasn't enough for this Nazi understudy. He further informed me, in all of his 19-year-old seriousness, that one did not sign the sign-in sheet while holding it, as I just had, but must, more properly, place it flat on the table first and then sign it in this best of all possible ways, in this best of all possible worlds.

As I say, it's the little moments of stolen dignity that eat away your defenses and make you wary to think or express yourself or to even seek "Shelter from the Storm."

At times, the streets are kinder.



"CHRISTIAN SOLDIER" Art by Jos Sances Mixed Media. digital print, paint and found objects

WE ARE!

by Claire J. Baker

We, the people, are capable of being great!
We are not nuts, bolts, wires,
transistors— parts of a machine.
We are resistors!

You cannot data process the "X" quantity
of human spirit:
we are not willing to be shot out of guns
boxed labeled—an insipid cereal
to be served.
We are to be deserved!

We are like an unfathomed ocean,
undiscovered cells,
We are not another planet,
with all its questions.
We are the question, we are the answer!

All of those specks running around,
beneath iron traps
beneath death-ray doors
beneath structural-steel grins,
are We the People.

You cannot kill us.
We are incapable even of dying!

God

by Mary Meriam

If not now, when?
If not by noon or midnight,
solstice or equinox,
how many seconds or
centuries more will the
planets wheeze and whirl
before revelation unravels?
And who will answer
if not you?

street smarts

by Randy Fingland

the faces of government
change slowly
but quickly

evidence surfaces
that the mind
& heart

of governorship
remains decidedly
the same as it was

Pigeons for Peace

by Claire J. Baker

Each bird is sleek, strong-winged,
glows as though lit by candlelight,
shines colors of stained-glass windows.
Each has the heart of an eagle,
the grace of moonlight on a beach.
Each bird has been carefully chosen
and we know they know
by the gleam in their eyes.

We privately damn every weapon
ever forged, every family fight
and neighborhood crime.
We tape peace poems to pigeons' legs,
open their cages and let them fly.

Though they be but fifty birds
they appear as fifty thousand.

Anonymous Painting

by Claire J. Baker

A young creamy-skinned
woman wearing a white gown
stands gazing at the last page
in a leather-bound book.
A modern Book of Hours?
A text for Nirvana four poets
wrote beside the ocean?

Perhaps Einstein
inscribed this final page —
a bitter entry urging
the world to turn back
to zero
then smash
the nuclear clock?

The Civil War

by David O'Neal

I

My great-grandfather trudged with the South
in the Civil War.
William Dent was his name — he was never the same.
Will was a drummer with the Fife and Drum Corps;
he was fifteen; for his friend Jed, it was the endgame.

Jed, playing the no-keyed fife, gave up his life:
instantly dead, from a musket ball to his head.
Will stooped down and held him, amidst the strife;
Jed's brains gushed out and he bled and bled and bled.

The next day, from a cannon ball, Will lost his legs.
The pain was horrible and Will passed out.
Until he died, not young, he walked on pegs.
That war was hell Will had no doubt!

II

My great uncle Lewis fought for the North
in the Civil War.
They made him an artillery spotter
in the Massachusetts Two Eighty Four.
He was twenty, then was cannon fodder.

At Gettysburg he was blown to smithereens;
The soldier next to him lost both his eyes.
Fragments were left of Lew, or so it seems.
The soldier screamed the most terrible cries.

Possibly in the earlier battle
Great uncle Lew directed the same shell
which rolled through the fife and drum like cattle.
And hit great-grandfather Will — who can tell?

III

Grandchildren of Will, and Lewis's brother,
Were born, grew up on different sides of the line,
Came to Washington and married each other.
They were my parents: Will and Adeline.

Sons and fathers were butchered and families rent
in the Civil War.
Neither army won, it was a holocaust!
Bones, heads, hearts broken, lives destroyed, spent.
Horrendous was the ultimate cost of the Civil War.

Thunder Hooves

by Michael Andrew Glaros

Thundering echo of hooves
across hard-packed sand
muscles in motion
straining and taut
flared nostrils eyes wild
mane flaying about
excited breath
frosted in the air
hard gallop — chasing
pursuing the spirit of freedom

The Silence Envelops Us

by Teddy Bakersfield

For as far as the eyes can see
Those tracks divide the town in two
And for reasons I cannot yet grasp
An overwhelming silence ensues

I see schizophrenics talking to themselves
While walking along empty streets
Separated not only by the tracks
But by their own privatized worlds

I see the cell phone users
With hands held tightly to their ears
Plastic devices securely ensconced
Also unaware of any other presence

In the Wal-Mart stores, I find
It is not the aisles that divide
But the intense preoccupation
Of hundreds of people so focused
On the necessities they can barely afford

And while the people traverse the aisles
The CEOs of these businesses are paid
Over four hundred times more than
The clerks and shoppers in their stores

Perhaps this accounts for the silence
That has enveloped us all
The creation of an isolated people
Where schizophrenics seem normal
Where there are no longer citizens

But millions and millions of consumers
Who though they have eyes and ears
No longer have the time or energy
To see or hear or listen and in this
I am reminded of Gallup New Mexico

The eerie silence, the stark emptiness
The waiting in line to be checked out
By a beaten down clerk
Unable to pay her rent

The mega store that Fortune Magazine
Praises as an ideal corporate model
Where millions of Americans pay homage
and pray for minimal survival

SPARECHANGERS

by Julia Vinograd

The sparechangers on the street are terrorists
exploding in front of our eyes.
Bombs in torn tennis shoes
with the soles coming off.
Bombs in paper cups held out for quarters;
"Can you drink from the cup I drink of?"
Bombs piled in shopping carts
under a rain slicker under the rain.
Bombs hidden under a blanket huddled in a doorway.
The man talking to himself is counting down the wires
of the timer in his head,
and those aren't children, they only look like children.
The corner tribe of runaways hang out,
playing with their pet rat
but their tattoos are coded instructions
where to attack next:
a rose means a cathedral, a spider means a school,
isn't it obvious?
The violinist with long black hair
playing christmas carols in front of the bank
has a machinegun in her violin case.
She's a little out of date.
She should have a bomb, she should be a bomb.
Everyone's a bomb. We hold our breath
waiting for the explosion.

Ice Sculpture Eagle Beak Drips

by Saiom Shriver

A congressional luncheon
of a politician on the military spending committee
as time goes on, the ice sculpture eagle
begins to drip from the beak.

as ice becomes water
the frozen becomes flexible
a spear point becomes peace
One function becomes the power of all function

What moves mountains of
ice? Faith in the Sun.

Black Sheep

by Joy Bright McCorkle

Once they find their real names, the calls to relatives are made.
But often when informed, they don't care where we're laid.
They don't want our animals, possessions or truck.
So the city gets all our possessions and our truck.
All "black sheep" of the family,
They seem relieved we're finally gone.
No more calls from detox, jails or pens.
It seems our only family are other homeless friends.
It is the dirty, shaggy homeless people who remember us with love.
Hopefully, our true worth will be judged by those above.
Like the tombstones of the Gold Rush our epitaphs seem to say,

"Arrived from Nevada un-named the next day."